

## WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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### ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Antigua and Barbuda's two-island nation has a total land area of 170 square miles, 108 on Antigua and 62 on Barbuda. Its population is approximately 66,000. The dominant religion is Christianity (mostly Anglican, Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic), but religious freedom for others is not affected adversely. The minority religions are Islam, the Baha'i Faith, and Rastafarianism.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. Most government officials are Christian and Christian Holy Days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. Members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law enforcement officials unfairly target them. However, it is not clear whether such complaints reflect discrimination on the basis of religious belief by authorities or simply enforcement of laws against marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

##### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. The Antigua Christian Council, an interdenominational group, conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**ARGENTINA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Constitution states that the Federal Government “sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith” and provides it some privileges not available to other religions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, continued to occur.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 1,056,642 square miles, and its population is approximately 36,960,000. The Government has no accurate statistics on the percentage of the population that belongs to the Catholic Church and the other registered churches because the national census does not elicit information on religious affiliation. The Roman Catholic Church claimed 25 million baptized members (approximately 70 percent of the population). Approximately 2.9 million persons, or about 8 percent of the population, are believed to be evangelical Protestants (of whom 70 percent are Pentecostal). There are approximately 180,000 Jews (0.5 percent), 100,000 Apostolic Armenian Orthodox (0.3 percent), and 4,000 Anglicans (0.01 percent) in the country. These statistics were published in the mass-circulation magazine *Gente* in 1999 and are not necessarily authoritative. For example, the number of Muslims was estimated at 800,000 (2 percent of the population), but this figure is disputed by various experts as too high, probably representing all persons of Middle Eastern ethnic origins, many of whom actually do not profess the Muslim faith. One prominent local historian estimated that the actual number of practicing Muslims was closer to 15,000 (0.04 percent). A 1999 Gallup poll estimated that approximately 7 percent of the population (about 258,700 persons) do not profess any religion.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution grants to all residents the right “to profess their faith freely,” and also states that foreigners enjoy all the civil rights of citizens, including the right “to exercise their faith freely.”

The Constitution states that the federal Government “sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith,” and the Government provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies. The Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Worship is responsible for conducting the Government’s relations with the Catholic Church, the non-Catholic Christian churches, and other religious organizations in the country.

The Secretariat of Worship maintains a National Registry of approximately 2,800 religious organizations representing approximately 30 religious denominations, including most of the world’s major faiths. Religious organizations that wish to obtain tax-exempt status must register with the Secretariat and must report periodically to the Secretariat to maintain their status. Possession of a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy are among the criteria the Secretariat considers in determining whether to grant or withdraw registration. A new draft law on religion under consideration by Congress would make registration voluntary and would change other elements of the existing law.

The Secretariat of Worship promotes religious pluralism through such activities as conferences at which representatives of the various religious communities meet

to discuss current issues. Leaders of the non-Catholic faiths are invited regularly to attend the Te Deum Mass celebrated in the Metropolitan Cathedral on important national holidays. The Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) are holidays. After some confusion as to whether employees had to be paid their normal salary when they were not working on these religious days, the national Congress passed a law in 2000 requiring that such employees must be paid. The legislature also decided that the same rules should apply to Muslims on their religious holidays. The Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations (DAIA), the leading organization representing the Jewish community, is seeking to have Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur declared as national holidays on which most schools and public offices would be closed.

Registered religious organizations may bring foreign missionaries into the country by applying to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies the immigration authorities so that the appropriate immigration documents may be issued. There have been no reports of any groups being denied visas for their foreign missionaries.

Public education is secular, but students may request instruction in the faith of their choice, to be carried out in the school itself or at a religious institution, as circumstances warrant. Many churches and synagogues operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

In January 2000, President De la Rúa committed the Government to implementing a Holocaust Education Project to be carried out under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force. In late 2000, a senior diplomat was appointed as the country's representative to the Task Force. Representatives have attended meetings of the Task Force as official observers, although the Government has applied to the president of the Task Force for consideration for full membership. The president of the Task Force has not indicated when the country could be integrated as a full member. The Government also began a number of projects including a Holocaust memorial in front of the Congressional building in Buenos Aires and donated a building for a Museum of the Holocaust. On April 19, 2001, in commemoration of the National Day of Tolerance, the Task Force organized a forum on the Holocaust and issues of cultural diversity in the National High School of Buenos Aires. The Ministry of Education is working to include Holocaust education in primary and secondary schools, and has provided training for provincial teachers on Holocaust issues.

The federal government sponsored a number of religious conferences and task forces in cooperation with local nongovernmental organizations (NGO's). In April 2001, the "Holocaust: Memory and Education Forum" was held in Buenos Aires. In May 2001, a conference on the role of religious organizations of social action in conjunction with social programs of the state was held in Buenos Aires.

In May 2000, the Secretariat of Worship created a formal advisors group. The 12 advisors are all laypersons representing different religions. They report directly to the Minister of Worship and advise the Secretariat on issues of common concern, including the new draft law on religion.

The Government, under the lead of the Secretariat of Worship, is in the process of drafting a new Law on Religion, in conjunction with various representatives of religious groups. Draft provisions of the law would define the term "religious liberty," make registration of religious groups at the Secretariat of Worship voluntary, make religious groups other than the Roman Catholic Church eligible to receive funds from the federal government, and create an Advisory Council on Religious Freedom composed of representatives from a variety of religions, as well as theology experts.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion; however, the Government provides the Catholic Church with some subsidies not available to other religions, and some other religious groups have made allegations of religious discrimination in the military and some federal ministries. The Government provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies totaling approximately US \$8 million per annum (8 million pesos) administered through the Secretariat of Worship.

In April 2001, the Jewish community organization DAIA criticized the provincial government of Catamarca over the issue of teaching religion in public schools. Article 270 of the provincial Constitution, in place since 1988, made the teaching of religion in public schools to minors obligatory as long as the parents agreed on the creed being taught. The Article specified that all students would receive instruction in their parents' faith, thus separating children according to religion in a potentially discriminatory fashion. The Article did not take effect until 1999 and affected the 2000 and 2001 school years. After DAIA's initial statements to the media, the pro-

vincial governor, Oscar Aníbal Castillo, revoked the article by ministerial decree in April 2001. Catholic religious leaders demanded that the Article be reinstated. The provincial government and leaders of various religious groups agreed to negotiate a compromise allowing schools in Catamarca to make religious instruction an optional activity which would be held after school hours; however, by the end of June 2001, the negotiators had not reached a final agreement as to the curriculum and where and when it would be enacted.

Some members of the non-Roman Catholic communities perceive religious discrimination in the military service and in some federal ministries. It is difficult to characterize this discrimination accurately and to measure it. Representatives of the Jewish community claim that there have been few if any Jewish citizens who have chosen to seek employment with the military or selected ministries largely due to a perceived fear of future discrimination in obtaining higher rank and appointments. Despite this assertion, there have been government ministers and other Jewish senior government officials in the current and past administrations.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

Fifteen former Buenos Aires provincial police officers were linked to a stolen vehicle ring, which furnished the van used in the 1994 AMIA Jewish Cultural Center bombing. They face various criminal charges (see Section III).

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities are amicable; however, religious discrimination, especially anti-Semitism, remains a problem. NGO's actively promote interfaith understanding. Ecumenical attendance is common at important religious events, such as the Jewish community's annual Holocaust commemoration.

In May 2001, the Interfaith Center for Social Responsibility (CIRS), an NGO, was officially inaugurated in a ceremony that took place in the National Congressional Chambers. The board of CIRS is made up of religious leaders from the Jewish, Catholic, Methodist, and Muslim faith communities. The goal of CIRS is to reach, inform, and mobilize persons to take social action, primarily through their religious organizations. The first public campaigns of CIRS addressed increasing organ donation awareness and ending child labor.

Religious discrimination remains a problem. Most published reports of antireligious acts were anti-Semitic in nature, although there are also reports of isolated anti-Muslim and anti-Christian acts. Combating religious discrimination and other forms of intolerance is the stated goal of the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an agency of the Ministry of Interior. The Institute, which includes on its board representatives from the major religious faiths, investigates violations of a 1988 law that prohibits discrimination based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, sex, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics," and carries out educational programs to promote social and cultural pluralism and combat discriminatory attitudes. Despite serious problems due to institutional reorganization in early 2000, the agency has renewed effectiveness, although it still has no legal power.

There were a number of reports of anti-Semitic acts, of anti-Semitic violence, and of threats against Jewish organizations and individuals during the period covered by this report. There was also one report of anti-Christian and one report of anti-Muslim violence.

Representatives of the Jewish community, including researchers at the DAIA Center for Social Studies, claim that the number of anti-Semitic incidents decreased somewhat over the period covered by this report. The most frequent incidents include occurrences of anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi graffiti and posters in cities throughout the country.

In June 2000, religious statues were vandalized at a Catholic church in Buenos Aires. No arrests or leads have been reported.

In July 2000, three female Jewish teachers at a school in Buenos Aires received threatening e-mail containing anti-Semitic language. School officials reacted quickly, and a conference on tolerance was organized within the school.

In September 2000, several tombs were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in the Chaco Province. The police investigated the case, but have no leads. Investigations continued into vandalism at Jewish cemeteries in Ciudadela (1998), La Tablada,

Buenos Aires province (September 1999), and Liniers, Buenos Aires province (October 1999), but there have been no arrests.

There was no progress in the case of three youths arrested for smashing tombs in a Jewish cemetery in Liniers in January 1998, or in the case of the two former Buenos Aires provincial police officers who were suspected of December 1997 attacks on two Jewish cemeteries.

In January 2001, unidentified persons threw a bomb at the windows of a Shiite Islamic Mosque in Buenos Aires. The blast caused significant damage to the Islamic bookstore located in front of the building and injured a police sergeant guarding the mosque. Following a government official's declaration, the police provided increased security for all religious institutions. No progress has been made in the investigation into this bombing.

Following the January 2001 attack on the mosque, the San Justo Islamic Cultural Center in Buenos Aires reported that they received an anti-Islamic threat.

In April 2001, Alberto Merenson, a retired musician and former director of the Symphonic Orchestra of San Juan Province, received a letter bomb, which injured him and damaged his home. A swastika was found inside the box. There has been no progress in the investigation of this crime.

On May 20, 2001, at least one person shouted anti-Semitic remarks at the Secretary for Security for the Ministry of Interior, Dr. Enrique Mathov, while he attended the funeral of a member of the Federal Police. No charges have been brought in this case, and the accused is not believed to be associated with a larger anti-Semitic organization.

Anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant incidents also have occurred in the past at several soccer matches, particularly at matches where one of the teams had a connection with the country's Jewish community. In early 2001, the Argentine Soccer Association established rules whereby games can be stopped or cancelled when any ethnically discriminatory incidents or taunting occur. Since its implementation, this measure reportedly has been successful in reducing discriminatory acts at soccer matches.

There were some developments involving cases of antireligious discrimination from earlier years. In April 1998, a court convicted three Buenos Aires youths for a 1995 assault on a man whom they believed to be Jewish. The court found that the three youths had acted out of "hatred due to race, religion, or nationality," and that they violated the 1988 anti-discrimination statute. They were sentenced to 3 years imprisonment, the maximum penalty provided by law. In February 1999, an appeals court overturned the conviction and ordered the three retried in another court. In October 1999, the Attorney General recommended to the Supreme Court that the original verdict and sentence be sustained. In March 2001, the Supreme Court upheld the 1999 Appeals Court decision and directed that the three youths be tried again. No date for the new trial has been set.

There have been no further developments in the following anti-Semitic incidents: the August 1999 bomb threat against two Jewish families in Paraná, or the Entre Rios and September 1999 incident in which unknown persons shot at a Jewish school in La Floresta. There were no further developments in the cases of bomb threats made to the new AMIA building in 1999, the theater in Tucuman in 1999, or the Jewish country club in San Miguel in February 2000.

The investigations into the 1992 terrorist bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) continued. A December 1999 report by the Supreme Court formally determined that Islamic Jihad was responsible for the embassy bombing, based on claims made by the group following the attack and on similarities with other bombings claimed by the group. In September 1999, the Court issued an international arrest warrant for Islamic Jihad leader Imad Mughniyah. No further developments on the embassy bombing took place during the period covered by this report.

There were several developments in the case of the AMIA bombings. In July 1999, the authorities brought formal charges against all the suspects being held in connection with the attack, including a number of former Buenos Aires provincial police officers. The authorities issued charges against Wilson dos Santos, who reportedly had linked Iranian Nasrim Mokhtari to the bombing, arrested him in Switzerland, and extradited him to Argentina in December 2000. The authorities charged him with giving false testimony in the AMIA case in 1999.

Fifteen former police officers are among the 20 defendants who have been linked to a stolen vehicle ring, which furnished the van used in the bombing, and who face various criminal charges. The provincial police officers and others held in the AMIA case are suspected accessories to the crime and not those who are thought to have planned or executed the actual attack. In late February 2000, the investigating judge formally presented for trial the report on his investigation regarding these

suspected accessories. The defendants who are former police officers face charges of various acts of police corruption related to the stolen vehicle used in the bombing. The trial of some of these policemen is scheduled to begin in September 2001 after delays caused by a judge asking for leave due to an illness and the defendants filing for a delay in the date. Judge Galeano's investigation of the bombing continued.

In April 2000, President de la Rúa created a new task force of four independent prosecutors to investigate certain aspects of the AMIA case. The task force is working in parallel with other investigating authorities. On the sixth anniversary of the AMIA bombing in July 2000, President de la Rúa and much of his Cabinet attended a ceremony commemorating the victims at the now-rebuilt cultural center.

In November 1999, Foreign Minister Guido di Tella issued a report of the Government's Commission of Inquiry into the activities of Nazism in the country (CEANA). The report included a preliminary count of at least 180 "war criminals" from Germany, France, and Croatia, who entered Argentina after World War II, and identified a shipment of stolen gold from Croatia's central bank that was sent to Argentina. The report also addressed the extent of Nazi influence on the country during the 1930's and 1940's. CEANA also has published the results of its research in academic journals and has organized seminars in various universities. In April 2001, President De la Rúa extended CEANA's mandate through September 2001. In June 2000, President de la Rúa, during an official overseas visit, made a formal apology for the country's acceptance of Nazi war criminals as immigrants after World War II.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officers meet periodically with a variety of religious leaders and attend events organized by faith-based and nongovernmental organizations that deal with questions of religious freedom. In April and May 2001, the Embassy co-sponsored with the Simon Wiesenthal Center an exhibit on the Holocaust titled "The Courage to Remember."

In April and May 2001, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, at the request of Judge Galeano, sent a team of specialists to work with the judge and other Argentine government officials involved in the AMIA investigation.

The U.S. Embassy assists on an ongoing basis with the Government's implementation of a Holocaust Education Project carried out under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force.

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## BAHAMAS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 13,939 square miles, and its population is approximately 305,000.

There are a wide variety of religious beliefs in the country. Over 90 percent of the population profess a religion, and anecdotal evidence suggests that most of these persons attend services on a regular basis. The country is ethnically diverse, with a Haitian minority of as many as 40,000 persons, and a white/European minority that is nearly as large. The country's religious profile reflects this diversity. Protestant Christian denominations (including Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Evangelicals, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Salvation Army) are in the majority, but there are significant Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, and Muslim communities are also active. A small but stable number of citizens identify themselves as Rastafarians, while some members of the country's small resident Guyanese and Indian populations practice Hinduism and

other South Asian religions. Although many unaffiliated Protestant congregations are almost exclusively black, most mainstream churches are integrated racially.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although there is often reference to the country's strong Christian heritage in political and public discourse, there is no established or official state religion. Clergy are trained freely in the country and the Constitution specifically forbids infringement of a person's freedom to change religion.

Religion is recognized as an academic subject at government schools and is included in mandatory standardized achievement and certificate tests for all students. The country's Christian heritage has a heavy influence on religion classes in government-supported schools, which focus on the study of Christian philosophy, biblical texts, and to a much lesser extent, comparative and non-Christian religions. The Constitution allows students, or their guardians in the case of minors, to opt out of religious education and observance in schools, and this right—although rarely exercised—is respected in practice. Churches and other religious congregations do not face any special registration requirements, although they must incorporate legally in order to purchase land. There are no legal provisions to encourage or discourage the formation of religious communities, which are required to pay the same tariffs and stamp taxes as other companies once they legally incorporate.

The Government permits foreign clergy and missionaries to enter the country and to practice their religion without restriction.

The Government meets regularly with religious leaders, both publicly and privately, to discuss social, political, and economic issues.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among religious congregations are generally harmonious. There were no reports of religiously motivated violence or discrimination against members of religious minorities during the period covered by this report.

There are several interdenominational organizations and ecumenical movements. These groups freely express their opinions on social, political, and economic issues.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## BARBADOS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Barbados, the most eastern island in the Caribbean chain, has a total land area of 166 square miles; its population is approximately 265,000. Some 96 percent of the population are of African descent. The majority of worshippers adhere to Anglican belief. The dominant religion present in the country is Christianity, with over 125 different denominations. Significant numbers of worshippers are Catholics, Moravians, Methodists, Seventh-Day Adventists, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Baha'is, Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians (Nyabinghi School) or members of other faiths or beliefs, including the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), which sponsors missionary activity.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular, but most government officials are Christian. The Government does not take any steps to promote interfaith understanding but also does not monitor or discriminate according to religious faith. Christian holy days such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country has a history of being open and tolerant of diverse forms of worship. Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conduct activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

Although society is dominated by Christian attitudes, values and mores, individuals respect the rights of religious minorities such as Jews, Baha'is, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**BELIZE**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 8,867 square miles. Its population of approximately 250,000 persons includes a growing Mestizo population (46.4 percent), a diminishing Creole component (27.7 percent), a stable Mayan element (10 percent),



and a Garifuna component (6.4 percent); the balance of the population (9.5 percent) includes Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans. Most citizens are Roman Catholic (58 percent). Even when Creoles predominated, Roman Catholicism was the principal faith. At one time, 80 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, which underlies the Church's continuing influence in society.

Despite the long period of British colonial rule, only 7 percent of the population are Anglicans. Another 6 percent are Pentecostals. Other faiths and denominations have fewer than 10,000 members. Among them are Methodists (4.2 percent), Seventh-Day Adventists (4.1 percent), and Mennonites (4 percent). There are approximately 5,000 Hindus and Nazarenes and modest numbers of Baha'is, Baptists, Buddhists, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Rastafarians, and Salvation Army members, all of whom are able to proselytize freely. Except for the Mennonites and Pentecostals who mostly live in the rural districts of Cayo and Orange Walk, followers of these minority faiths tend to live in Belize City. Roman Catholics are numerous throughout the country and constitute the majority faith in all but one of the country's six districts. In Belize district, Catholics hold a plurality but Anglicans constitute over 27 percent of the population. Only about 6 percent of citizens identify themselves as nonbelievers or members of no religious congregation. There were no reports of the mistreatment of atheists or agnostics.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. Nevertheless, the preamble to the Constitution makes a very strong affirmation that "the nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God."

Under the Constitution, freedom of religion is part of a broader protection—that of freedom of conscience. In addition, the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to a person's religion or belief.

There are no special registration requirements or fees for religious organizations, and legal incorporation for a religion or denomination is a simple matter. Property taxes are not levied against churches and other places of worship. However, property taxes are levied against other church-owned buildings occupied on a regular basis such as the pastor's/priest's residence.

Clergy preach, teach, and train freely.

Under the country's revised Immigration and Nationality Act, foreign religious workers are permitted to enter the country and proselytize; however, they must be registered and purchase a religious worker's permit. The yearly fee is modest. There is a steady stream of religious workers and missionaries from the United States. In addition to preaching, these visitors are involved in building and/or renovating schools and churches, providing free medical and dental care, and distributing donated food, clothing, and home fixtures.

The Constitution stipulates that religious communities may establish "places of education" and states that "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community." Although there is no state religion, separation of church and state is ill-defined in the country's educational system, which maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. It requires in both public and private schools that primary school students, from kindergarten through sixth grade, receive 220 minutes of religious instruction and chapel every week. However, school-exit exams do not have a section on religion. There are efforts underway to lessen the religious component of the school day, but most citizens likely would object to a strictly secular school day. Roman Catholic holy days are routinely school holidays. However, the Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a child to receive religious instruction or attend any religious ceremony or observance without his consent or, if under the age of 18, the consent of the child's parents. This constitutional safeguard is particularly important because most of the country's primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated.

The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without their consent while serving in the armed forces or detained in prison or in any corrective institution.

In order to help maintain religious harmony, the Constitution reserves the right of the Government to intervene in religious matters "for the purpose of protecting

the rights and freedoms of other persons,” including the right to observe and practice any religion “without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion.”

Several traditional Christian religious holidays, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day, are observed as national holidays. These holidays do not negatively impact any religious group.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who were abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government’s refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the faiths are harmonious. Religious groups occasionally join forces in ecumenical efforts to distribute goods to the needy, clean up neighborhoods, alert the public to the dangers of sexual promiscuity, fight crime, protect children, and carry out similar endeavors.

Extortion attempts have been made against Mennonite communities; however, these incidents do not appear to have been due to the religion of the victims. The motive for targeting Mennonites seems to be monetary because some are very prosperous by the country’s standards.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. In addition, embassy representatives met with Mormon and Mennonite community leaders during the period covered by this report, primarily to discuss the crime situation.

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## BOLIVIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Roman Catholicism is the official religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 425,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 8.15 million.

The Government did not ask for religious affiliation in the ongoing census. Roman Catholics constitute the majority (estimated at 80 percent) of the population. Protestant Christian denominations are estimated to account for 12 to 15 percent of the population. In the country’s last census (1992), 3 percent of the population specifically indicated that they had no religious affiliation, with the remainder not specifying or listing religions with statistically small followings. There are 272 registered religious groups, mostly Protestant; another approximately 130 applications are pending.

Anywhere between 50 and 60 percent of the population identifies itself as indigenous, from Aymara (est. 1.5 million), Quechua (2.4 million), Guarani (77,000), Chiquitano (63,000) or 1 of 20 other smaller groups. The percentage of the population identifying themselves as indigenous is higher in rural areas, and the Roman Catholic Church tends to be weaker in these parts of the country due to both a lack of resources and indigenous cultural resistance. For many individuals, identification with Roman Catholicism coexists with an attachment to traditional beliefs and rituals, with a focus on the “Pachamama” or “Mother Earth” figure, as well as on “Akeko,” originally an indigenous god of luck, harvests, and general abundance,

whose festival is celebrated widely on January 24. Some indigenous leaders have sought to discard all forms of Christian religion. In 2000 the Government registered 19 religious groups, including 1 traditional indigenous religious group.

Missionary groups include Mennonites, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and many evangelical groups. Most can be characterized as Christian minority religious groups rather than separate religions.

Many church representatives from other countries play a major role in the country. The Mormons have inaugurated a temple/center in Cochabamba for their activities in western South America. There is also a small Jewish community with a synagogue in La Paz, and a few Muslims and a mosque in the eastern city of Santa Cruz. Korean immigrants have their own church in La Paz. The majority of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants have settled in the city of Santa Cruz where they have established communities. There is a university in the city founded by Korean immigrants, which has evangelical/Presbyterian ties. There are Buddhist and Shinto communities, as well as a considerable Baha'i community spread throughout the country.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Roman Catholicism predominates, and the Constitution recognizes it as the official religion. The Roman Catholic Church receives support from the State (about 300 priests receive small stipends from the State) and exercises a limited degree of political influence through the Bolivian Bishops' Conference.

In July 2000, President Hugo Banzer Suarez signed a Supreme Decree (similar to an executive order) governing the relationships between religious organizations and the Government, which then entered into force. The new decree replaced a 1985 decree that had been the subject of criticism by Catholic and non-Catholic churches. The new decree reflects input from the churches and, according to the Government, is designed to increase transparency and dialog in church-state relations. For example, under the 1985 decree, evangelical groups had to receive permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship before conducting public gatherings such as outdoor celebrations; the 2000 decree requires only that groups consult civil authorities to address concerns such as traffic. The 2000 decree also requires that the fundraising reports of religions be certified by a notary public. This new requirement is designed to protect churches against allegations of money laundering or receiving money from drug funds.

Non-Catholic religious organizations, including missionary groups, must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and receive authorization ("personeria juridica") for legal religious representation. The Government is not known to seek out or restrict gatherings of nonregistered religious groups; however, registration is essential for tax, customs, and other legal benefits. The Ministry cannot deny any organization based on its articles of faith; however, the procedure typically requires legal assistance and can be time consuming. The process has led to the abandonment of a number of officially pending applications that require further legal revision.

Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement ("convenio marco") with the Government, lasting 3 years, which permits them to enjoy a judicial standing similar to the standing of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) and to have tax-free status. Some 20 religious groups, including the Catholic Church, have this framework agreement with the Government.

Only Catholic religious instruction is provided in public schools. It is described as optional, but it is not evident that steps are taken to destigmatize nonparticipation. Non-Catholic instruction is not yet available in public schools for students of other faiths; an alternate course on "ethics" has not yet been implemented. The Constitution prohibits discrimination in employment based on religion, and it does not appear to be common.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Government denied religious registration to Hari Krishna in the 1980's, on the grounds of what the Government describes as nonfaith based activities of the group, and has not acted on a new application by that organization initiated in 2000. The Government considers the previous decision to be valid and in force. How-

ever, Hari Krishna continues to operate with official standing as an educational organization.

In 1996 a local mission, the Ekklesia Church, protested its investigation by the Government; however, the issue appeared to be more one of adhering to administrative and fiscal norms than a true religious matter. Based on government allegations of misuse, some of the Ekklesia mission's customs privileges as a religious organization were suspended; however, the Ekklesia church remains registered legally as a religious organization.

The Government does not take any steps to promote interfaith understanding. If the President goes officially to Mass, it is traditional for his Cabinet to accompany him, even though political leaders may have different religious beliefs.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the country's diverse religious communities are amicable, as ecumenical dialog between them continues. In June 1999, the Catholic Church announced that it would no longer call neo-Pentecostal and evangelical churches "sects," which increasingly has been viewed as a pejorative term, but would call them instead "religious organizations." As a demonstration of improving Catholic-Protestant relations, a nationwide meeting of Catholics and Protestants was held in May 2000. Similar meetings were held at the departmental level in La Paz and Cochabamba in May and June 2000, and future meetings are planned. In addition, the churches are encouraging interfaith dialog at the grass-roots level between their members.

In June 1999, a meeting was held among Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious leaders in order to initiate an interfaith dialog in the country. The Catholics and Methodists of Cochabamba have collaborated on publications and vigils, and following the Vatican's lead, Catholics and Lutherans in Bolivia now recognize each other's rituals of baptism.

There are no serious rivalries between religious groups, although there were reports of some resentment of missionary groups by Roman Catholics.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights and as an independent issue. The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers meet regularly with religious authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, principal religious leaders, and the Papal Nuncio.

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## BRAZIL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to the free practice of religion, although a rivalry exists among various religious groups vying for greater numbers of adherents.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has total land area of 3,281,865 square miles, and its population is approximately 172.8 million.

Nearly all major religions and religious organizations are present in the country. The Catholic Church's National Council of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) estimates that roughly 75 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage of that number regularly attend Mass. Roughly 20

percent of the population identify themselves as Protestants, the majority of which are Pentecostal/evangelical. Evangelical churches have grown rapidly and have challenged the religious predominance of the Catholic Church. An estimated 85 percent of the country's Protestants are affiliated with Pentecostal/evangelical minority religious groups. Minor denominations include the Assembly of God and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Lutherans and Baptists make up the bulk of the remaining Protestants and are centered in the southern part of the country, where the majority of German and northern European immigrants concentrated during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Followers of African and syncretistic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constitute roughly 4 percent of the population. Candomble is the predominant traditional African religion practiced among Afro-Brazilians. It centers on the worship of African deities brought to the country as a result of the slave trade. Syncretistic forms of African religions that developed in the country include Xango and Macumba, which to varying degrees combine and identify indigenous animist beliefs and Catholic saints with African deities. The capital of Bahia State, Salvador, where most African slaves arrived in the country, is considered the center of Candomble and other traditional African religions. As a result of internal migration during the 20th century, Afro-Brazilian and syncretistic religions have spread throughout the country. Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists—followers of the doctrine transcribed by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century—constitute roughly 1 percent of the population. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion.

Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Arab countries who have arrived in the country during the past 25 years. Shintoism is maintained to a limited degree among the Japanese-Brazilian community.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There are no registration requirements for religions or religious groups. There is no favored or state religion. All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize, although the Government controls entry into Indian lands. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments.

The Government restricts the access of missionary groups to indigenous peoples and requires groups to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations among the various religious communities in the country, although a natural rivalry exists among various religious groups vying for greater numbers of adherents. The influence of evangelical churches in the country is growing. There is no national ecumenical movement.

In 1999 leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern about the appearance of anti-Semitic propaganda on neo-Nazi Internet sites in Brazil during the previous 3 years, and newspaper reports indicated that Rio de Janeiro prosecutors were beginning an investigation into anti-Semitic Internet sites in May 2001. Jewish community activists report that although neo-Nazi groups have issued threats against at least one prominent leader, there have been no reports of any violent incidents directed at Jews.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**CANADA**

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 3,850,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 30.7 million.

There is no state or dominant religion; however, an estimated 82.1 percent of the population belong to Christian denominations, with Roman Catholics (45.2 percent) forming the largest single group. Other Catholic groups include Eastern Orthodox (1.4 percent) and Ukrainian Catholics (0.5 percent). Protestants constitute an estimated 36.4 percent of the population, consisting of the United Church (11.5 percent), Anglicans (8.1 percent), Presbyterians (2.4 percent), Lutherans (2.4 percent), Baptists (2.5 percent), Pentecostals (1.6 percent), and other Protestant denominations (7.9 percent). Members of other religions include Jews (1.2 percent), Muslims (0.9 percent), Buddhists (0.6 percent), Hindus (0.6 percent), Sikhs (0.5 percent), groups such as Scientology, Kabalarianism, and Rastafarianism (0.1 percent), and other religions (0.1 percent). Those professing no religion constitute an estimated 12.5 percent of the population.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious groups do not have to register with the Government.

The Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect the rights or privileges possessed by denominational schools at the time of national union in 1867. In practice this protection has meant that some provinces have funded and continue to fund Catholic school education, and some provinces (such as Quebec) have funded some Protestant education. In March 1999, the government-mandated Proulx task force submitted its report to Quebec's National Assembly. Its 14 recommendations include abolishing Catholic and Protestant status for public schools and creating secular public schools instead, with religions studied from a cultural perspective. School boards are scheduled to respond to the Quebec government by July 1, 2001. In May 2001, the Ontario provincial government announced a new policy providing tax credits for private school tuition, including for all private religious schools. Previously, the province provided tax credits only for private Roman Catholic schools.

In the 2000–2001 academic year, the Saskatoon school board implemented a new policy that replaced its prior policy requiring children to recite (or remain silent during the recital of) the Lord's Prayer. Under the new policy, daily school opening exercises are limited to: instruction on the values education units developed by the Saskatoon Public Schools Division; opportunities for personal reflection through a moment of silence; writing in a personal journal; or sharing a thought for the day; or singing the national anthem.

There is no official government council for interfaith dialog, but the Government provides funding for individual ecumenical projects on a case-by-case basis.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. However, in May 2001 a Muslim chaplain filed suit in federal court against an Ontario provincial judge who had ejected him from the courtroom in 1993 for wearing a Muslim cap. The chaplain's initial complaints filed with the provincial and federal human rights commissions were dismissed because the law provides for immunity from human rights laws for judges.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 280 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2000. This represented an increase of 5 percent from the 267 incidents reported in 1999. In February 2001, the Human Rights Tribunal (a government entity) completed hearings on the Zundel case examining whether a specific web site exposed Jews to hatred or contempt on the basis of their race, religion, or ethnic origin. The Tribunal is expected to issue a decision by the fall of 2001.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**CHILE**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom in the period covered by this report. In March 2000, the Government promulgated a law designed to bring other religious entities closer to the legal status enjoyed by the Catholic Church; however, the Catholic Church still retains an privileged position. Absent specific regulations to implement the new law in government institutions, non-Catholic ministers reported that local administrators sometimes impeded their efforts to carry out their ministries in hospitals, prisons, and military units.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 292,257 square miles and its total population is estimated at approximately 15 million. According to the 1992 census, (the latest official figures available), of the population over the age 14, approximately 77 percent were identified as Roman Catholic. (The census does not take into account religion for persons under age 14.)

The term Evangelical in Chile is used to refer to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Armenian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of Evangelicals are Pentecostal. The 1992 census used the terms "Protestant" and "Evangelical" to inquire as to religion, although the terms are often considered interchangeable. Evangelicals totaled 1,198,385 persons, or 12 percent of the population over the age of 14. Those identifying themselves with the term Protestant accounted for 8,259 persons, less than 1 percent of the population. In the census, atheists and those "indifferent" totaled 562,285, or approximately 6 percent of the population over the age of 14. All other religions totaled 409,910 persons, or slightly over 4 percent.

In 1997 spokespersons for Protestant organizations estimated the number of Evangelicals in the country at between 1.8 and 2 million persons. Other estimates are as high as 3 million persons. The active Jewish population is estimated to be

around 30,000 persons. The number of Protestants and Evangelicals has increased steadily with each census since 1930, when only 1.5 percent of the population claimed to be Protestant. The relative percentage of Catholics declines with decreases in socioeconomic status. A 1991 survey found that 93.4 percent of high-income respondents indicated they were Catholic; the proportions declined to 75.2 percent in the middle-income group, and to 69 percent among those in the lower-income group. The survey found that 22 percent of persons at the lower-income levels were Protestants. A June 1998 national survey conducted by the Center for Public Studies (CEP) suggested that 43 percent of Evangelicals were converts from another religion; 98 percent of Catholics had been born into that religion.

The CEP study also found that 8 out of 10 citizens believe in the existence of God, while 14 percent were doubtful and only 2 percent declared themselves atheists. Approximately 72 percent of those surveyed identified themselves as Catholics, 16 percent identified themselves as Evangelicals, 7 percent stated that they had no religion, 4 percent adhered to other religions, and 1 percent did not respond.

The CEP poll also found that 18 percent of respondents claimed to attend a church or temple at least once a week. A 1995 CEP survey placed this figure at 27 percent. In the 1998 survey, 29 percent stated that they never attended religious services. Thirty-two percent stated that they prayed at least once a day and 15 percent stated that they never prayed.

There are a wide variety of active faiths. In addition to the dominant Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Church, Lutheran Church, Reformed Evangelical Church, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, and the Patriarch of Antioch Orthodox Church are among the Christian denominations present. The Mormons and the Unification Church also are active. Other faiths include Judaism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Members of all major faiths are concentrated in the capital, with Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches also active in other regions of the country. Jewish communities also are located in Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in the Iquique).

Foreign missionaries operate freely, and many priests are of foreign origin.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Church and state are officially separate. However, the Catholic Church continues to enjoy a privileged position among religions and receives preferential treatment. In addition to Christmas, five Roman Catholic holidays are considered national holidays.

Before the March 2000 adoption of the new law on religion ("ley de culto"), religious faiths and related organizations other than the Roman Catholic Church were required to register with the Ministry of Justice as private, nonprofit foundations, corporations, or religiously affiliated clubs to receive tax-exempt status and the right to collect funds. Groups without such juridical status could worship, but did not enjoy the tax-exempt status, fund collection rights, and other benefits that come with legal recognition. Some 800 religious faiths and related organizations are registered under the old system with the Ministry of Justice. Government refusal to register a religious group, or withdrawal of its legal status, was rare, and generally stemmed from misuse of funds by the group or widespread criminal allegations.

Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church was not governed by the same regulations as other religions; it was not required to register with the Ministry of Justice and enjoyed what amounted to "public right" ("derecho publico") status. Public right status provides that a church cannot lose its juridical standing administratively. Until the new law on religion took effect, the only other church body with this legal status was the Antioch Orthodox Church. Previously, all other religions, and groups affiliated with other religions, only enjoyed "private rights" ("derecho privado"), which allowed for the lifting of status administratively. Approval of the new legislation came only after the law was reworded to make clear that the status historically enjoyed by the Catholic Church would not be affected by the new law.

One of the most important aspects of the new law on religion is that it allows any religion to obtain the legal public right status. Under the new law, the Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registry petition although it can object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites to register have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry's observations in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the State no longer has the ability to dissolve it by decree. This only may occur through a judicial review initiated by the semiautonomous Council



for the Defense of the State (CDE), which is the official entity charged with defense of the State's legal interests.

In addition, the new law allows churches to adopt a charter and by-laws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. Churches may set up affiliates (schools, clubs, sports organizations) without the need to register them as separate, independent corporations. The law also grants other religions the right to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units.

Only about 10 religious faiths and related organizations have changed their legal status with the Ministry of Justice by the end of the period covered by this report; another 90 groups are in the process of doing so. Many churches have delayed registering because of the complexities involved in formulating a new charter and by-laws. Many others have hesitated because of the taxes and fees involved in transferring the property from the old legal entity to the new one. Efforts are underway to have the Government grant a one-time waiver of these taxes and fees for the initial reregistration.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The new religion law grants religions other than the Catholic Church the right to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. However, without specific regulations to implement the new law on religion, non-Catholic ministers continue to report that local administrators present difficulties in granting them access to prisons and public hospitals. Catholic priests usually do not face such difficulties. Although there is a perception that the situation is improving, access remains at the discretion of administrators. Public events are frequently marked by the celebration of a Roman Catholic Mass and, if the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Roman Catholic. The military continues to block efforts by non-Catholic faiths to provide military chaplains. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Roman Catholic Church is considered beneficial to one's military career.

Schools are required to offer religious education, on an optional basis, twice a week through middle school. It is mandatory to teach the creed requested by parents, although enforcement is sometimes lax. Local school administrations decide how funds will be spent for religious instruction. The result is that instruction is predominantly in the Roman Catholic faith. According to an unconfirmed press report, the Education and Gospel Task Force in San Pedro de la Paz filed a claim charging that the public school discriminated against Protestant students and families by only hiring Catholic teachers. The group claims that the law allows for parents to request instruction for their students by trained Protestant teachers. The group also maintains that the community is 40 to 50 percent Protestant, and that certified Protestant teachers have applied for jobs, but all have been denied.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the country's religious communities are generally amicable; however, some discrimination and misunderstandings occur. The new law on religion includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination.

Ecumenical groups exist, although they often are formed on an ad hoc basis depending on the issue involved. All major faiths continued to participate in a human rights "dialog table" led by the Defense Minister, which concluded its activities and submitted a report to the Government on January 6. In addition to Catholic events, government officials attend major Protestant and Jewish religious and other ceremonies.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

U.S. Embassy representatives met with a wide variety of religious leaders, including Santiago's Archbishop and key representatives of Evangelical and Jewish organizations. Informal contact is maintained with representatives and leaders of several other faiths.

As appropriate embassy officials have cooperated on programs such as anti-drug efforts with church-affiliated groups and the B'nai B'rith.

## COLOMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. There is no state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status. Paramilitaries sometimes target representatives and members of the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christian churches, generally for political reasons. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla movements regularly targeted representatives and members of the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christian churches, generally for political reasons. Guerrillas killed, kidnaped, and extorted money from members of these groups, as well as inhibiting free religious expression.

Relations between various faiths are generally amicable, although some indigenous leaders reportedly were intolerant of nonsyncretistic forms of worship.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 751,680 square miles, and its population is an estimated 39,686,000. Although no official data are available, an April 2001 poll commissioned by El Tiempo newspaper indicated that the country's population is 81 percent Catholic. Of the remaining respondents, 10 percent were non-Catholic Christians, 3.5 percent were evangelical Christians, 1.9 percent professed no religion, 1.4 percent belonged to other religions, 1.3 percent were members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.1 percent belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), and 0.1 percent were Seventh-Day Adventists. According to the same poll, 60 percent of the respondents said that they do not practice their faith actively. Other religious faiths/movements include Jews, Muslims, animists, and adherents of various syncretistic beliefs. Agnostics and atheists also are present in the country.

Adherents of some religions are concentrated in specific geographic regions. For example, the vast majority of practitioners of a syncretistic religion that blends Roman Catholicism with elements of African animism are Afro-Colombians of Choco department. Jews are concentrated in the major cities, Muslims are concentrated on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions generally are found in remote, rural areas.

### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The law states that there is no official or state church or religion but adds that the State "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some observers have interpreted this to mean that the State unofficially sanctions a privileged position for the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholicism was the country's official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A Concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains active, although some of the articles have been excluded due to constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 Constitutional Court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to religious characterizations of the country.

The law on freedom of religion provides a mechanism for religions to obtain the status of recognized legal entities. The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religions: recognition of the church as a legal entity (*personeria juridica*) and special public recognition. The Ministry of Interior regularly grants the former type of recognition. The only legal requirement is submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. Additionally, any foreign religious faith that wishes to establish a presence in the country must document official recognition by authorities from its home country. The Ministry of Interior may reject any requests that do not comply fully with these established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights.

Accession to the 1997 public law agreement between the State and non-Roman Catholic religious entities is required for any religious group that wishes to minister to its adherents through any public institution, such as public hospitals or prisons, or to perform marriages that are recognized by the State. When considering granting accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government takes into account the number of adherents of the religious group, the degree of popular acceptance the group enjoys within society, and other factors deemed relevant, such as the content of the group's statutes and required behavioral norms. A total of 12 non-Roman Catholic Christian churches have received this special status; however, these churches report that some local authorities have failed to comply with the accord. More than 40 churches have requested accession to a new public law agreement with the Government, which, the churches propose, would have lower standards for recognition than the 1997 agreement. However, no progress was made towards a new agreement during the period covered by this report. No non-Christian religion currently is a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement. Some prominent non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jewish community, have not requested state religious recognition.

Foreign missionaries require a special visa, which is valid for a maximum of 2 years. The Ministry of Foreign Relations may issue visas to foreign missionaries or members of a foreign religion or denomination, provided that the religion or denomination has received special public recognition. Applicants are required to have a certificate issued by the Ministry of Interior confirming that the religious institution is registered with the Ministry, a certificate issued by the religious institution confirming the applicant's membership in that institution and explaining the purpose of the proposed travel, and proof of economic solvency. The Government permits proselytizing among the indigenous population, provided that it is welcome and does not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands.

The Constitution provides parents with the right to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious education. It also states that no one shall be obliged to receive religious education of any type in public schools. The Roman Catholic Church and religious groups that have acceded to the 1997 public law agreement with the State may provide religious instruction in public schools. (No non-Christian religion currently is a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement.) Religions without this special recognition may establish private parochial schools, provided that they comply with Education Ministry requirements. For example, the Jewish community operates its own schools.

The Catholic Church has a unique agreement with the Government to provide schools to rural areas that have no state-run schools. These schools are also tax exempt.

In April 2001, in response to a writ of appeal filed by an evangelical student, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary ruled that the Colombian Institute for Higher Education, which administers the country's college aptitude examinations, is required to provide alternate examination dates for evangelicals whose beliefs preclude taking examinations on Sunday.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Although the 1991 Constitution mandated the separation of the Catholic Church from the State, the Church retains a de facto privileged status. According to military regulations, only Roman Catholic priests may serve as chaplains. Participation in the 1997 public law agreement is required for non-Catholic groups in order to minister to soldiers, public hospital patients, and prisoners, and to provide religious instruction in public schools. The State only recognizes marriages celebrated by non-Roman Catholic churches that are signatories to the 1997 public law agreement. A total of 12 non-Roman Catholic Christian churches have received this special status. Some signatories to the public law agreement have complained of discrimination at the local level, such as refusals by municipal authorities to recognize marriages performed by these churches. However, two of these churches now are performing legally recognized marriages, and others expect to be granted recognition when the Ministry of Interior revises its implementing regulations for the public law agreement.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes. Local governments also may exempt from taxes religiously affiliated organizations such as schools and libraries. However, in practice, local governments often exempt only organizations that are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. According to the Christian Union Movement (MUC), an association of non-Catholic Christian churches, only 10 municipalities currently exempt non-Catholic churches from taxes.

Faced with threats by paramilitaries or guerrillas, many evangelical preachers were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal conflict. The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church also reported that paramilitaries, the ELN, and the FARC sometimes issued death threats against rural priests for speaking out against them.

The FARC has placed religious restrictions on persons within the "despeje," the demilitarized zone established in November 1998 in order to facilitate a Government-FARC dialog leading to formal peace talks. During the period covered by this report, the FARC guerilla movement continued to compel Roman Catholic and evangelical churches to pay "war taxes" levied on many organizations in the despeje and also imposed elsewhere in the country.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

Although guerrillas initially were suspected in the April 2000 massacre of 2 evangelical pastors and 12 other persons in Hato Nuevo, Bolivar, a Marine lieutenant and 6 Marine infantrymen are currently under arrest for homicide in this case. According to civilian investigators, the Marines were engaged in combat with the guerrillas and killed the two pastors, whom they had mistaken for guerrillas. They then attempted to hide their error by dressing the two bodies in guerrilla clothing. The other twelve dead are considered guerrilla combat casualties.

In April 1999, the army arrested Colonel Jorge Plazas Acevedo, the chief of intelligence for the army's 13th Brigade, for allegedly heading a gang believed responsible for the kidnaping and killing of several Jewish industrialists, including Benjamin Khoudari, who was killed in October 1998. In July 1999, the army retired Plazas. On April 1, 2000, the Attorney General's office publicly stated that it had found insufficient evidence to bring disciplinary charges against Plazas and asked the Prosecutor General's office to drop its criminal investigation. However, the Prosecutor General's office pursued the case. At the end of the period covered by this report, Colonel Plazas and one civilian paramilitary were on trial in a Bogota court. Two other civilian suspects confessed and are serving sentences. Prosecutors have ordered the capture of several other civilians in the case, who remain at large.

Paramilitaries sometimes target representatives and members of the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christian churches, generally for political reasons. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla movements regularly target representatives and members of the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christian churches, generally for political reasons, and killed, kidnaped, and extorted money from members of these churches, as well as inhibiting free religious expression. In August 2000, the human rights unit of the Prosecutor General's Office reported that it had 37 open cases of religiously motivated crimes.

The Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church reported that, from 1987 to 2000, illegal armed groups killed 15 Catholic priests (including 1 bishop) and 5 Protestant pastors. Of these 20 killings, 14 were attributed to the FARC, 4 to the ELN, and 1 to the People's Liberation Army (EPL, a small guerrilla group). According to the MUC, 30 evangelical pastors have been killed in the last 2 years, and more than 50 pastors have been killed in the last 8 years. FARC members were believed responsible for a majority of the killings. The MUC reported an estimated 58 FARC killings of members and pastors between January 1999 and July 2001.

In May 2001, one suspect was charged with the November 1999 killings of Roman Catholic priest Jorge Luis Maza and Spanish aid worker Inigu Egiluz in Choco department. The suspect is expected to stand trial in Quibdo, Choco department. Security forces had arrested nine members of a paramilitary group in connection with the crime.

There was no progress expected in the August 1999 killings of United Pentecostal Church of Colombia preachers Jose Honorio Trivino and Miguel Antonio Ospina.

In May 1999, members of the EPL killed Catholic priest Pedro Leon Camacho in Cachira, Norte de Santander, after he had criticized publicly the guerrilla group's abuses of the civilian population. One suspect in the case was cleared of all charges and released. A second suspect, already under arrest for an unrelated crime, has been charged as an accessory to kidnaping for extortion. However, the authorities have not charged anyone with homicide.

At year's end, the authorities had not yet captured two members of the FARC's 32nd Front—Arley Leal and Milton de Jesus Tonal Redondo ("Joaquin Gomez" or "Usurriaga"), head of the FARC's southern bloc—who were indicted in the 1998 killing of Father Alcides Jimenez in Putumayo. Jimenez was shot 18 times as he gave a sermon in a Catholic church hours after he led a public rally for peace.

On March 11, 2001, unknown persons killed Protestant pastor Onofre Hernandez Benitez as he came out of the Pan-American Church of Arauca. It remains unclear to what extent, if any, the killing was related to religion.

On March 27, 2000, unidentified persons killed Roman Catholic priest Hugo Duque Hernandez at Supia, Caldas department. The case was under investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

Despite increased pressure by the Government on the FARC to account for three American missionaries from the New Tribes Mission, who were kidnaped by FARC guerrillas in January 1993, their whereabouts and condition remained unknown.

According to the president of the MUC, there was an increase in the number of kidnapings for extortion during the period covered by this report.

In February 2001, evangelical pastor and radio network president Enrique Gomez was kidnaped by unknown persons in Apulo, a small town southwest of Bogota. Gomez reportedly is being held by the FARC for ransom, but his whereabouts and condition were unknown as of June 2001.

A report by the Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, published in 2000, stated that Roman Catholic churches in Huila, Tolima, Cauca, and Antioquia departments were destroyed through indiscriminate use of force by guerrillas during attacks on towns and police stations.

As of June 2000, the MUC had reported that the FARC had forced the closure of over 300 evangelical churches in Meta, Guajira, Tolima, Vaupes, Guainia, Guaviare, Vichada, Casanare, and Arauca departments. The MUC claims that as of May 2001, 120 more churches had been closed in the southwestern part of the country, and that the FARC in many cases forced the closure of rural evangelical schools. The group also reported that guerrillas continued to attack rural evangelical Christians and their churches in the mistaken belief that the churches were fronts for U.S. Government activities.

In January 2001, representatives of various Christian and evangelical churches reported that the FARC harassed congregation members for refusing to participate in coca cultivation in Meta and Caqueta departments.

Some indigenous groups with distinct animistic or syncretistic religious beliefs are targeted regularly for attack by guerrilla or paramilitary groups. However, these attacks generally are motivated by political differences (whether real or perceived) or by questions of land ownership, rather than by religious differences.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between various faiths are generally amicable. The Roman Catholic Church and some evangelical churches reported that some indigenous leaders were intolerant of nonsyncretistic forms of worship.

Jewish community leaders estimated that as many as one-third of the country's small Jewish community had fled the country at the end of 2000. The principal causes for this emigration included a number of kidnapings, assaults, and murders affecting Jewish business leaders, as well as economic problems resulting from the country's recession.

There was no reported progress in investigation of the April 2000 bombings of three Mormon temples in Cali, in an attack that appeared intended to target U.S. interests rather than the Mormon faith in particular.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, other Christian denominations, and other religions, and discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

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## COSTA RICA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as

the state religion. However, persons of all denominations freely practice their religion without government interference.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country Rica has a total area of 19, 652 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.82 million.

An April 2001 study by the Institute for Population Studies (IDESPO) of Costa Rica's National University reported 70 percent of the population as Catholic with 19 percent claiming membership in other religions and 11 percent claiming no religious affiliation. A 2001 Demoscopia, Inc. poll showed 73 percent of the population as belonging to other Christian, nonCatholic denominations, 4 percent belonging to nonChristian religions and approximately 8 percent as not practicing any religion. The mainstream Protestant denominations—largely Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopalian—account for slightly less than 1 percent according to the Demoscopia poll. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) claims a membership of less than 1 percent of the population, spread evenly throughout the country. A Mormon temple in San Jose serves as a regional worship center for Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong presence on the Caribbean coast and represent less than 1 percent of the population. Seventh-Day Adventists are present and operate a university, attracting students from throughout the Caribbean basin. NonChristian religions including Judaism, Islam, Hare Krishna and the Baha'i Faith claim membership throughout the country with the majority of worshippers residing in the country's Central Valley.

The country's tradition of tolerance and professed pacifism has attracted many religious groups. The Jewish population constitutes less than 1 percent of the country's total; many of its members found refuge before and during the Second World War. The mountain community of Monteverde, a popular tourist destination, was founded during the Korean War by a group of Quakers from the United States, acting on their convictions as conscientious objectors. The country welcomed this community, as well as those of Mennonites, Beechy Amish, and other pacifist religious groups.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion and requires that the State contribute to its maintenance; however, it also prohibits the State from impeding the free exercise of other religions "that do not impugn universal morality or proper behavior." Members of all denominations freely practice their religion without government interference.

The law grants the Catholic Church tax-free status and allows for the Government to provide land to the Catholic Church. In some cases, the Government retains ownership of the land but grants the Church free use while, in other situations, property simply is donated to the Church. This second method commonly is used to provide land for the construction of local churches. These methods do not meet all needs of the Church, which also buys some land outright. Government-to-Church land transfers are not covered under any blanket legislation. Instead, they are handled by specific legislative action once or twice per year.

The Government does not inhibit the establishment of churches through taxes or special licensing for religious organization. However, churches must incorporate to have legal standing, like any other organization.

Although not mandatory, Catholic religious instruction is permitted in the public schools. Religious education teachers in public schools must be certified by the Roman Catholic Church Conference, which does not certify teachers from other denominations or faiths. This certification is not required of public school educators who teach subjects other than religion. Denominational and nondenominational private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they see fit.

The Government does not restrict the establishment of churches. New churches, primarily evangelical Protestant churches that are located in residential neighborhoods, occasionally have conflicts with local governments due to neighbors' complaints about noise and traffic. In contrast, established Catholic Churches often are built around a municipal square and rarely present such problems.

Despite the official status of the Catholic Church, the Constitution places strict limits on the involvement of any clergy or layman motivated by religion in politics.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations work and proselytize freely.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedoms*

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

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Amicable relations exist among members of the country's different religions, including religious minorities. The country has a history of tolerance.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## CUBA

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In general unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference, harassment, and repression. Some unregistered religious groups were subject to official censure, and also faced pressures from registered religious groups. The Government's policy of permitting apolitical religious activity to take place in government-approved sites remained unchanged; however, citizens worshiping in officially sanctioned churches often were subject to surveillance by state security forces and the Government's efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion continued.

The U.S. Government has raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Cuban Government has dismissed these concerns. The U.S. Government continuously urges international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana maintains regular contact with various religious leaders.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 68,888 square miles and its population is approximately 11 million. There is no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. A 1953 survey indicated that 93 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic. During the period covered by this report, approximately 40 to 45 percent of the population generally are believed to identify themselves, at least nominally, with the Roman Catholic Church, according to information from the U.S.-based Puebla Institute. A significant number of citizens share or have participated in syncretistic Afro-Caribbean beliefs, such as santeria. Some sources estimate that as much as 70 percent of the population practice santeria or la regla lucumi, which have their roots in West African traditional religion.

The Baptists, represented in four different conventions, are possibly the largest Protestant denomination, followed closely by the Pentecostal churches, in particular the Assemblies of God. Twenty-five denominations recognized by the State, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists, are members of the Cuban Coun-

cil of Churches (CCC). Another 24 officially recognized denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the small Jewish community, do not belong to the CCC.

Although much of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, historically it has been a largely secular society without an especially strong religious character. Catholic Church officials usually estimate that approximately 10 percent of baptized Catholics go to Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant churches is estimated at 500,000 persons. No figures on the number of Pentecostals are available, although the Seventh-Day Adventists have stated that their membership numbers are around 30,000 persons. Church attendance has grown in recent years in some denominations, and increased substantially at Catholic Church services following the Pope's visit in January 1998. However, both Catholic and Protestant leaders believe that church attendance peaked during 1999 and early 2000.

There are approximately 320 Catholic priests, 40 deacons, and 650 nuns in the country, less than half the total prior to 1960. Overall numbers of church officials are only slightly higher than before the Papal visit, since most new arrivals replaced retiring priests or those whose time of service in the country had ended.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country through registered churches.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion. The Constitution has provided for the separation of church and state since the early 20th century. In 1992 the Constitution was changed and references to scientific materialism or atheism were removed. The Government does not favor any one particular religion or church; however, the Government appears to be most tolerant of some churches that maintain close relations to the State through the CCC.

The Government requires churches and other religious groups to register with the provincial Registry of Associations within the Ministry of the Justice in order to obtain official recognition. Although no new denominations were registered during the period covered by this report, the Government has tolerated some new religions on the island, such as the Baha'i Faith. However, in practice the Government refuses to register most new denominations.

Along with recognized churches, the Roman Catholic humanitarian organization Caritas, the Masons, small human rights groups, and a number of nascent fraternal or professional organizations are the only associations outside the control or influence of the State, the Communist Party, and their mass organizations. The authorities continued to ignore other religious groups' applications for legal recognition, thereby subjecting members of such groups to potential charges of illegal association.

The Government's main interaction with religious denominations is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. The Ministry of Interior still engages in efforts to control and monitor the country's religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons.

The Government has relaxed restrictions on most officially recognized religious denominations. In 1999 the secretary general of the World Council of Churches officially visited the CCC, met with government officials, and presided in a religious ceremony in the First Presbyterian Church in Havana. Jehovah's Witnesses, once considered "active religious enemies of the revolution," are allowed to proselytize quietly door-to-door and generally are not subject to overt government harassment, although there were sporadic reports of harassment by local Communist Party and government officials. In the past, the Government authorized small assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses, the opening of a central office in Havana, and publication of the group's magazine and other religious tracts.

There is no restriction on the importation of religious literature and symbols, if imported by a registered religious group in accordance with proper importing procedures.

In December 1998, the Government announced in a Politburo declaration that citizens would be allowed to celebrate Christmas as an official holiday; however, a December 1995 decree prohibiting nativity scenes in public buildings except those related to the tourist or foreign commercial sector remained in effect. On Christmas Day 2000, the Government organized and broadcast an ecumenical roundtable discussion on religion, society, and the new millennium.

Since 1992 the Communist Party has admitted as members persons who openly declared their religious faith.



The Government allowed some foreign priests and nuns to enter the country, but applications of 60 priests and 130 nuns remain pending.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Government led to strong confrontations with institutional churches in the early 1960's. During that period, many church leaders and religious professionals left the country, fearing persecution. Over 130 Catholic religious workers, including priests, were expelled, and a few served long prison terms. In 1965 the Government forced many priests, pastors, and others "who made religion a way of life" into forced labor camps called military units to aid production (UMAPS), alongside homosexuals, vagrants, and others considered by the regime to be "social scum." The UMAP system ended in 1967. However, over the following 30 years, the Government and the Communist Party systematically discriminated against and marginalized persons who openly professed their faith by excluding them from certain jobs (e.g., teachers). Although the Government abandoned its official atheism in the early 1990's, most churches had been weakened seriously, and active participation in religious services had fallen drastically.

In early 2001, the Communist Party in Havana prepared a document criticizing inroads into society made by churches, particularly the Catholic Church, and suggested ways in which party officials could supercede the pastoral work of the church. This document stated that churches were asserting themselves into secular society by violating laws and regulations. The church activities criticized by the report included helping the sick and elderly.

The law allows for the construction of new churches, but requires churches to apply for permits to authorize such construction; however, the Government rarely has authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. Most registered churches are granted permission to hold services in private homes. Churches are allowed to reconstruct churches and repair existing churches; however, this also requires a permit. The process of obtaining a permit and purchasing construction materials from government outlets is a lengthy and expensive process.

In March 2001, the Italian news agency ANSA reported that provincial leaders of the Communist Party requested followers to ensure that the charitable work and donations provided by religious groups be limited. The party officials apparently believed that churches, especially the Catholic Church, had gained community support through such activities which threatened the continued rule of the Communist Party. Following the publication of the article, Communist Party leaders in Havana reportedly apologized to the Catholic Church hierarchy.

In April 2000, because of complaints by the Pentecostals regarding unauthorized foreign missionaries (see Section III), the CCC formally requested overseas member church organizations to assist them in controlling foreign missionaries and prohibiting them from establishing unauthorized Pentecostal churches.

Religious officials are allowed to visit prisoners, but prison officials sometimes refuse visits to certain political prisoners. Prison officials took Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet's Bible, later replacing it with another copy. Prison officials also have denied Biscet pastoral visits.

The Government continued to enforce a regulation that prevents any Cuban or joint enterprise (except those with specific authorization) from selling computers, facsimile machines, photocopiers, or other equipment to any church at other than the official—and exorbitant—retail prices.

Some persons claim that the Government discourages members of the armed forces from attending religious services, especially in their uniforms.

Education is secular and no religious educational institutions are allowed. Religious instruction in public schools is not permitted. In the past, students who professed a belief in religion were stigmatized by other students and teachers and were disciplined formally for wearing crucifixes, and for bringing Bibles or other religious materials to school. In some cases in the past, these students were prohibited from attending institutions of higher learning or from studying specific fields; however, recently students who profess a belief in religion commonly attend institutions of higher education.

Churches provide religious education classes to their members. Catholic Church officials report that the number of children attending catechism classes has continued to drop, mostly because of other scheduled activities, usually by local school authorities. There have been no reports of parents being restricted from teaching religion to their children.

Church officials have encountered cases of religious persons experiencing discrimination because of ignorance or personal prejudice by a local official. Religious persons do encounter employment problems in certain professions, such as education.

Religious groups are required to submit a request to the local ruling official of the Communist Party before being allowed to hold processions or events outside of religious buildings.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

The Government monitors all religious groups, including registered and established institutions. The authorities also monitor church-run publications. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued, with evangelical denominations reporting evictions from houses used for those purposes. According to CCC officials, most of the private houses of worship closed were unregistered, making them technically illegal.

There were sporadic reports that local Communist Party and government officials harassed members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On August 30 2000, the independent press agency Group Decor reported that evangelical pastor Pablo Rodriguez Oropeza and his wife Enma Cabrera Cabrera were evicted from the house where they had lived for 6 years. The press agency did not report the reason for the eviction.

In October 1999, the leader of the United Pentecostal Church, Santos Osmany Dominguez Borjas, was expelled from Havana by security agents and was forced to relocate to Holguin. Osmany returned to Havana a few months later. Members of the United Pentecostal Church of Cuba-Apostolic ("Iglesia Pentecostal Unidad de Cuba-Apostolica") previously had split from the "Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ" because they did not agree with their church's membership in the CCC. Due to this split the group was not registered officially as a religious group.

During 1999 and the first 6 months of 2000, state security officers regularly harassed human rights advocates who sought to attend religious services commemorating special feast days, such as the September 1999 celebration in honor of Our Lady of Charity, or before significant national days. There were some reports that state security officers detained laypersons in order to prevent them from attending Christmas services and processions. Some persons who planned to participate in a religious procession reportedly were going to use the event to protest the continued imprisonment of political activists and other dissidents.

The Ministry of the Interior continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities, and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups and religious professionals and lay persons.

In April 2000, a leading editor of one of the Catholic Church's magazines was criticized in a major editorial of the Communist Party's newspaper as a "known counter-revolutionary."

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most persons largely define themselves as Roman Catholic, although few attend Mass regularly. Catholicism has remained a major cultural reference since colonial times. After 40 years of the current regime, societal attitudes, including those toward religion, are conditioned heavily by the attitude of President Fidel Castro and the ruling regime. The Government's decision to allow, and even provide some support for, the 1998 Papal visit greatly boosted the public perception that espousing religious faith was again acceptable. President Castro further cemented this view, most importantly among Communist Party adherents and government officials, in nationally televised and broadcast speeches in which he claimed that the Cuban Revolution had "never" persecuted religious believers.

There were some tensions among religions, often because some religious groups perceived others to be too close to the Government. Tension within the Pentecostal movement increased due to the establishment of house churches, which some churches believed was fractious, and resulted in Government action against Pentecostal worshippers. In addition, Pentecostal members of the CCC have complained that the preaching activities of unauthorized foreign missionaries has led some of their members of their churches to establish new denominations without obtaining the required permits (see Section II).

The CCC is the only ecumenical body that is recognized by the Government. It comprises many Protestant and Pentecostal denominations and engages in dialog with the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The Council and the Government generally have a mutually supportive relationship.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. Government policy toward Cuba is to promote peaceful, democratic changes and respect for human rights, including religious freedom and the U.S. Government encourages the development of civil society, which includes the strengthening of religious institutions. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana maintains regular contact with the various religious leaders and communities in the country, and supports nongovernmental organization initiatives that aid religious groups. The U.S. Government regularly seeks to facilitate the issuance of licenses for travel by religious persons and for donated goods and materials that in some cases are provided to religious institutions. The U.S. Interests Section has raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Cuban Government has dismissed these concerns. The Interests Section reports on cases of religious discrimination and harassment, and the U.S. Government continuously urges international pressure on the Cuban Government to cease its repressive practices.

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**DOMINICA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Dominica, a mountainous island of 289 square miles, has a population of approximately 72,000. The dominant religion is Christianity, and some 77 percent of the island's residents are Roman Catholic. There are Anglican, Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witnesses communities. The minority religions are Islam, the Baha'i Faith, and Rastafarianism.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular, but most government officials are Christian. The Government does not restrict an individual's right to worship. The Government does not take any steps to promote interfaith understanding but also does not monitor or discriminate according to religious faith. Christian holy days such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. Members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law enforcement officials unfairly target them. However, it is not clear whether such complaints reflect discrimination on the basis of religious belief by authorities or simply enforcement of laws against marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. The Dominica Christian Council and the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches conduct activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Dominican Republic, which comprises two-thirds of the island of Hispanola, has a total area of approximately 16,435 square miles, and as of July 2000, the population was 8,442,533.

The major religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Evangelical Christians (especially Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-Day Adventists, the Watchtower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. Jehovah's Witnesses have a large country headquarters, school, and assembly hall complex in the national district. In 2000 the Mormons completed the construction of a major temple in Santo Domingo with an associated administrative and educational facility. Many Catholics also practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santeria) or witchcraft (brujeria), but since this practice rarely is admitted openly the number of such adherents is impossible to estimate. Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are practiced. There are synagogues (but no rabbis at this time) and there is as yet no mosque in the country.

According to Demos 97, a population survey taken in 1997 by the Instituto de Estudios de Poblacion y Desarrollo, the population is 68.1 percent Roman Catholic and 11 percent Protestant Christian, inclusive of evangelicals, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants. In the same study, 20.1 percent of the sample said that they had no religion. However, evangelical Christians claim 20 to 25 percent of the population, while the Catholic Church claims 87 percent.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is no state religion. However, religious groups are required to register with the Government in order to operate legally. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church must request exemptions from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency when importing goods. At times the process of requesting and being granted a tax exemption can be lengthy; some requests have been denied.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Roman Catholic Church, which signed a concordat with the Government in 1954, enjoys special privileges not extended to other religions. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and a complete waiver of customs duties when importing goods into the country. The Government generally does not interfere with the practice of religion;

however, attendance at Catholic Mass for members of the National Police is compulsory.

In July 2000, then-President Leonel Fernandez signed a law making Bible reading in public schools obligatory. This new law added Bible reading to the weekly flag raising and singing of the national anthem in public schools. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading as part of their weekly activities.

Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration laws that govern other foreign visitors. There have been no reports that the Government has ever used these laws to discriminate against missionaries of any religious affiliation. However, in practice the process of applying for and receiving residency status can be long and costly for denominations that bring in many foreign missionaries, including groups that proselytize heavily such as evangelical Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The acquisition of a resident status from immigration authorities currently requires an investment of approximately \$35,000 (RD\$ 577,500), which some groups find overly burdensome. So far, the potential negative impact has been avoided only by the liberal use of administrative appeals.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among different religious congregations are harmonious, and society generally is tolerant with respect to religious matters. However, there were occasional reports of religious discrimination on the part of individuals. The evangelical churches proposed a bill requiring Bible reading in public high schools. The Catholic Church opposed the measure, however, negotiations between the two groups on compromise language ended amicably.

An August 1999 report that the directors of Pilar Constanzo Polytechnic School, in Villa Duarte, National District, were discriminating against students and teachers who were not Catholics appears to have been resolved. The public school laid off at least 10 teachers, and there were also complaints that Protestant students were refused admission, despite excellent test scores and grades. Students whose parents are members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons, or who adhere to faiths other than Catholicism allegedly were refused entry to the school. Teachers of various denominations work at the school and no similar complaints were lodged against the school during the period covered by this report.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## ECUADOR

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 109,500 square miles, and its population is estimated at 12,920,000. The General Registry of Religious Entities has registered 1,329 different religious groups, churches, societies, Christian fraternities, and foundations.

Together with the military and the Government, the Roman Catholic Church is viewed widely as one of the three pillars of society. Approximately 90 percent of the

population considers itself to be Roman Catholic, although most citizens do not practice the religion, or instead follow a syncretistic version. For example, many sierra Indians follow a brand of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to Indian deities. In 2001 the Catholic Church had 34 bishops and 1,766 priests to minister in 1,200 parishes. At the political level, the Government retains strong ties to the Vatican; the Papal Nuncio is the customary dean of the diplomatic corps.

Some Christian, non-Catholic, multid denominational groups such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active in the country for many years. Other active Protestant groups include the Evangelical Group, World Vision, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which operates in remote areas with the eventual objective of translating the Bible into indigenous languages.

The combination of poverty, neglect, and syncretistic practices in urban and rural areas created conditions that were conducive to the spread of Protestant missionary and Pentecostal evangelical activity. Such activity began in the 1960's, but became more pronounced in the 1980's. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormon Church), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals have been successful in finding converts in different parts of the country, particularly among indigenous people in the Sierra provinces of Chimborazo and Pichincha, persons who practice syncretic religions, and groups that are marginalized from society.

The following faiths and denominations also are present in the country, but in relatively small numbers: Anglican, Assembly of God, Baha'i, Buddhist, Episcopalian, Hindu, Jewish, Lutheran, Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, and the Church of Scientology. Two relatively new groups are the Native American churches of Itzachilatan, whose adherents practice Indian healing rites and nature worship, and the followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god. Atheists also exist. The total of these non-Catholic groups represents about 10 percent of the population.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice the faith of their choice freely, in public or in private; the only limits are "those proscribed by law to protect and respect the diversity, plurality, security, and rights of others."

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered unless they engage in commercial activity. Requirements for registration are outlined in "The Regulation of Religious Groups" of 2000. These requirements include: non-profit status; information on the nationality and residence of group leaders; and the names used by the group, in order to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission. Any religious group wishing to register with the Government must file a petition with the Ministry of Government and provide documentation through a licensed attorney.

The Government permits missionary activity and religious demonstrations by all religions.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; private schools have complete liberty to provide religious instruction, as do parents in the home. There are no restrictions on publishing religious materials in any language.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to return to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although relations between religious communities generally have been amicable, there have been a few incidents of interreligious or intrareligious tension or violence during periods prior to that covered by this report.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is involved in a 5-year legal dispute with the former owner of some land purchased for a new temple in Guayaquil; however, the case does not appear to be religiously motivated.

In general religious tensions tend to be intrareligious and largely stem from power struggles and personality differences.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**EL SALVADOR**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution specifically recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it legal status.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land of 8,108 square miles, and its population is over 6 million.

The country is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to a 1995 survey by the Central American University Public Opinion Institute (IUDOP), approximately 56.7 percent of the population were members of the Roman Catholic Church. Additionally, 17.8 percent were members of Protestant churches, 2.3 percent were associated with other churches and religious groups, and 23.2 percent were not affiliated with any church or religion. Outside of the Catholic and Protestant churches, there are small communities representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-Day Adventist, Baptist, Jewish, and Muslim faiths, among others. A very small segment of the population practices a native religion. The predominance of the Catholic Church does not impact negatively on the religious freedom of other denominations. Several Protestant missionary groups are active in the country.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution specifically recognizes the Roman Catholic Church, and grants it legal status. In addition, the Constitution provides that other churches may register for such status in accordance with the law. The Civil Code specifies that a church must apply for formal recognition through the General Office of Non-Profit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) within the Ministry of Interior. Each church must present a constitution and bylaws that describe, among other things, the type of organization, location of offices, goals and principles, requirements for membership, type and function of ruling bodies, and assessments or dues. The DGFASFL must determine that the constitution and bylaws do not violate the law before it can certify a church. Once certified, the church must publish the DGFASFL approval and its constitution and bylaws in the official government gazette.

In 1997 the Government implemented a 1996 law that charges the Ministry of Interior with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) and non-Catholic churches in the country. The law

specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church. The Ministry of Interior already was responsible for registering non-Catholic churches before passage of the 1996 law. The law and the implementing regulations did not change the existing mechanism for church registration. There have been no allegations that churches encountered problems in obtaining registration.

The regulations implementing the tax law grant recognized churches' tax-exempt status. The regulations also make donations to recognized churches tax-deductible.

Non-Salvadoran nationals seeking to promote actively a church or religion must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities. Visitors to the country are not allowed to proselytize while in the country on a visitor or tourist visa. There were no allegations during the period covered by this report of difficulties in obtaining visas for religious activities.

Public education is secular. Private religious schools operate in the country. All private schools, whether religious or secular, must meet the same standards in order to be approved by the Ministry of Education.

The Constitution requires the President, cabinet ministers and vice ministers, Supreme Court justices, magistrates, the Attorney General, the Public Defender, and other senior government officials to be laypersons. However, there is no such requirement for election to the National Legislative Assembly or municipal government offices.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

In December 2000, the Attorney General asked a lower court judge to adjudicate the legality of reopening the case of the 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter. The Attorney General took this action in response to a March 2000 formal request from the rector of the Central American University to prosecute the crime's alleged instigators. The judge ruled that the accused were not covered under the 1993 General Amnesty Law, because they were public officials at the time of the killings. However, she closed the case because the 10-year statute of limitations had expired. In December 2000, both the defense and the prosecution appealed the decision. The defense asked the court to find their clients not guilty rather than apply the statute of limitations. In January 2001, the appeals court upheld the lower court's decision to close the case based on the statute of limitations. It took no position on the amnesty. In an appeal allowed under the law, in February 2001, the prosecution asked the appeals court to reconsider its verdict, which the prosecution alleged was flawed. In March 2001 the appeals court upheld its January ruling.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to the free practice of religion. Four of the largest Protestant denominations—the Episcopal, Baptist, Lutheran, and Reform churches—are part of the National Conference of Churches (CNI), an interfaith organization created to promote religious tolerance and to coordinate a church-sponsored social program.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government maintains a regular dialog with the principal religious leaders, church officers, church-sponsored universities, and NGO's.

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## GRENADA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.



There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Grenada and 2 smaller islands, Carriacou and Petit Martinique, have a total area of 133 square miles and a population of some 98,000 persons. The dominant religion is Christianity (mostly Roman Catholic, Anglican, Seventh-Day Adventist, Presbyterian, Church of God, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal). The minority religions are Islam, the Baha'i Faith, and Rastafarianism.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. Most government officials are Christian and Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

##### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. There are no known activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## GUATEMALA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government has not implemented provisions of the Peace Accords regarding the rights of indigenous people that protect the exercise of indigenous religious beliefs and practices.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has land area of 41,699 square miles and the population is slightly over 11 million. While no definitive census data are available, the country's indigenous population is estimated at 55 to 60 percent of the total population.

Historically, the country has been an overwhelmingly Catholic country. However, in recent decades, evangelical Protestant groups have gained a significant number of members. Although there is no accurate census of religious affiliation, some sources estimate that between 50 and 60 percent of the population is Catholic and approximately 40 percent is Protestant, primarily evangelical. Leaders of Maya spiritual organizations maintain that 40 to 50 percent of the population practices some form of indigenous spiritual ritual, but that only about 10 percent do so openly. Other religious groups are represented, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, small communities of Jews, Muslims, and followers of Indian spiritual leader Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Although many persons nominally affiliated with Catholicism or a Protestant denomination do not actively practice their religion, few citizens consider themselves atheists. There are no accurate statistics on church attendance, although various sources report that it is very high in the evangelical community and somewhat lower in the Catholic community.

The largest Protestant denomination is the Assembly of God, followed by the Church of God of the Complete Gospel, and the Prince of Peace Church. There are numerous other Protestant denominations represented, some specific to Central America and others, such as Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, which are represented worldwide.

Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of syncretistic practices than the Catholic Church, whose current policy is to accept any pre-Columbian or traditional practices that are not in direct conflict with Catholic dogma. Some observers maintain that a majority of the indigenous members of evangelical churches secretly practice traditional Maya rituals.

Catholic and Protestant churches are distributed throughout the country, and their adherents are distributed among all major ethnic groups and political parties. However, evangelical Protestants appear to be represented in greater proportion in the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), which became the governing party when it won the presidency and a majority in Congress in the winter 1999 elections. The FRG is headed by former de facto President and retired General Efraim Rios Montt, now President of Congress and a long-time elder of the evangelical Protestant Church of the Word.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government has not implemented the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which provides for the respect of spiritual rights of indigenous people. The Agreement calls for Congress to pass legislation to amend the Constitution in order to "recognize, respect, and protect the distinct forms of spirituality practiced by the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka" groups. While the previous Congress passed a law containing 50 proposed constitutional amendments, including this one, the package was defeated in a popular referendum in May 1999, and no further efforts have been made to amend the Constitution. There is no state religion; however, the Constitution recognizes explicitly the separate legal personality of the Catholic Church.

The Government does not establish requirements for the recognition of religions. Members of a religion need not register simply in order to worship together. However, the Government does require religious congregations (as well as other nonreligious associations and nongovernmental organizations) to register as legal entities in order to be able to transact business. Such legal recognition is necessary, among other things, for a congregation to be able to rent or purchase premises, enter into contracts, and enjoy tax-exempt status. The Government does not charge religious groups a registration fee.

The Catholic Church does not have to register as a legal entity. For non-Catholic congregations, the process for establishing a legal personality is relatively straightforward, and the requirements do not vary from one denomination to another. A congregation must file a copy of its bylaws and a list of its initial membership with the Ministry of Government. The congregation must have at least 25 initial members, and the bylaws must reflect that the congregation will pursue religious or spiritual purposes. Applications are rejected only if the organization does not appear to

be devoted to a religious purpose, appears to be in pursuit of illegal activities, or engages in activities that appear likely to threaten the public order. There were no reports that the Government rejected any group's application.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary visa, which is issued for a period of up to 1 year and is renewable. Such visas require a sponsor who is able and willing to assume financial responsibility for the missionary while he or she is in the country. With a missionary visa, foreign missionaries may engage in all lawful activities, including proselytizing.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups directly. However, some sources report that the Government occasionally provides financial assistance to private schools established by religious organizations. The Constitution permits religious instruction in public schools, although public schools are not required to provide such instruction. There is no national framework for determining the nature or content of religious instruction in public schools. Accordingly, when provided, such instruction tends to be programmed at the local level.

The Government does not have any organized programs to promote interfaith understanding or dialog. Nonetheless, the Government has sought the support of diverse religious groups for passage of legal statutes on the rights of children and with implementation of health and literacy programs for children. For a number of churches, such public service projects are the only forum for interaction with adherents of other faiths.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

While there is no government policy of discrimination, a lack of resources and political will to enforce existing laws and to implement the Peace Accords limits the free expression of indigenous religious practice. Indigenous leaders note that Maya culture does not receive the official recognition that it is due. The Government has not provided mechanisms for free access to ceremonial sites considered sacred within indigenous culture, nor has the Government provided for the preservation or protection of such ceremonial sites as archaeological preserves. The Government's use of sacred sites as revenue-generating tourist destinations is considered by some indigenous groups to be an affront to their spiritual rights.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

On June 8, a court convicted three military officers, former Presidential Military Staff (EMP) specialist Obdulio Villanueva; active-duty EMP Captain Byron Lima Oliva; and Lima Oliva's father, retired Colonel Byron Lima Estrada, of the April 26, 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi, the Coordinator of the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights. The court sentenced them to 30-year, noncommutable sentences. Because the murder occurred just 2 days after Bishop Gerardi delivered the final report of the Office's "Recovery of Historical Memory" project, which detailed many of the human rights abuses committed during the internal conflict and held the military, military commissioners, and civil self-defense patrol forces responsible for more than 90 percent of war-related human rights violations, some observers had suspected a political motive for the crime. There was no evidence that suggests the murder was motivated by the Bishop's religious faith or practice. The court also found the bishop's assistant, Father Mario Orantes, guilty and sentenced him to 20 years' imprisonment.

Prosecutors appear to have dropped the case of Mayan priest Raul Coc Choc who was shot and killed at his home in the department of Chimaltenango. Coc Choc was a leader of the National Association of Mayan Priests; members of the board reported that he had received numerous death threats over the telephone.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees. However, there were credible reports that agents of Military Intelligence continue to monitor the activities of religious leaders well after the end of the armed conflict.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable, if distant. According to members of the Catholic, evangelical Protestant, and Jewish communities, complaints of discrimination on the basis of religion are rare. There were no reports of violence against religious minorities. However, widespread intolerance of the free practice of traditional indigenous religious rituals was reported.

Although indigenous Guatemalans outnumber the westernized “Ladino” community, they historically have been dominated by the Ladinos and generally excluded from the mainstream of social, economic, and political activity. The Ladino community long has regarded indigenous people with disdain. Reports of discrimination against indigenous religious practices must be viewed in the context of this widespread Ladino rejection of indigenous culture.

Within the Jewish community, there were virtually no encounters with anti-Semitism. However, a leader of the Jewish community reported that Jews do not feel that they are seen to be fully Guatemalan by their compatriots of other faiths.

Maya religious leaders note widespread discrimination by evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, by Catholics. For example, despite the large number of indigenous members of evangelical congregations, traditional religious practice often is described as “witchcraft” or “devil worship.” Indigenous evangelicals regularly are threatened with expulsion from the church if they should become involved with traditional religious practices.

There is a split among evangelical Protestant churches between a majority group, which strongly opposes ecumenical engagement with other churches or religious traditions, and a minority group, which actively promotes an ecumenical and multicultural vision. Within the former organization, groups that engage with practitioners of other faiths are asked to renounce their status as evangelical churches within the organization and are given the status of public service agencies instead.

The ecumenical movement is very weak, although there are occasional interfaith meetings.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officials at various levels, including the Ambassador, have met on many occasions with leaders of major religious institutions within the country as well as religious-based nongovernmental organizations. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is working closely with Maya spiritual leaders in conducting community mental health projects linked to the exhumations of mass graves created during the internal conflict, which are only now being unearthed. USAID also supports bilingual education for indigenous children which is based on the Maya worldview, including core spiritual values. The Public Affairs Section of the Embassy has promoted dialog between leaders of Maya and Ladino groups within civil society and within diverse religious communities. The Public Affairs Section also has sponsored ecumenical events focused on the role of religion in the construction of peace.

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### GUYANA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Despite ethnic tensions, the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 82,980 square miles, and its population is approximately 700,000. The country is very religiously and ethnically diverse. Nearly half of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, and more than one-third of the population is of African descent. These two major ethnicities, along with smaller groups of native South Americans and persons of European and Chinese descent, practice a wide variety of religions.

Approximately 50 percent of the population are either practicing or nominal Christians—of these roughly one-third are Anglicans, one-quarter are Roman Catholics, and one-quarter are Pentecostals and Baptists; there are smaller percentages of Methodists, Presbyterians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans, and members of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Practicing or nominal Hindus constitute approximately 33 per-

cent of the population, and Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) constitute about 15 percent. There are also a small number of Mormons and Baha'is. Although not included in official figures, substantial numbers of persons practice Rastafarianism and/or a traditional Caribbean religion known locally as "Obeah," either apart from or in conjunction with the practice of other faiths. Members of all ethnic groups are well represented in all religions, with two exceptions: almost all Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, while nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese.

There are a wide variety of foreign missionaries in the country.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Members of all faiths are allowed to worship freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion, and the Government practices no form of religious favoritism or discrimination.

Until 1979 almost all elementary and high schools in the country were run by church-affiliated organizations. In 1979 the Government effectively banned such schools, took church school property without compensation, declared that all schools would come under government control, and required that all children attend public, nondenominational schools. However, beginning in the late 1980's, these provisions were relaxed. Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the schools of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government makes no requirements regarding religion for any official or nonofficial purposes.

The Government has promoted cooperation among religious communities as a means of addressing long-standing racial tensions.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the country's diverse religious communities are amicable. Although significant problems exist between the country's two main ethnic groups, religious leaders have worked together frequently to attempt to bridge these gaps.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## HAITI

The Constitution provides for the right to practice all religions and faiths, provided that practice does not disturb law and order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 10,714 square miles and shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. Its estimated population is 7 to 8 million.

While precise statistics are unavailable, about 80 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic. Most of the remainder belong to a variety of Protestant denominations. The largest of these are Baptist (10 percent) and Pentecostal (4 percent). Other significant non-Catholic Christian groups include Methodists, Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Adventists, and Orthodox. There are also many nondenominational Christian congregations. The percentage of Protestants generally is acknowledged to be growing, but reliable statistics are unavailable. Small numbers of non-Christian groups are present, including Jews, Muslims, Rastafarians, and Baha'is. Voodoo, a traditional religion derived in part from West African beliefs, is practiced alongside Christianity by a large segment of the population. While there are associations of voodoo practitioners and priests, there is no organized hierarchy or established voodoo church.

Many foreign missionaries are affiliated with U.S.-based denominations or individual churches. Others are independent, nondenominational Christian groups. Missionary groups operate hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics throughout the country. U.S. churches often send teams to Haiti on short-term projects. Some of these projects involve humanitarian or educational work, while others are purely evangelistic in nature.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy are active in politics. A Protestant pastor leads a political party, MOCHRENA (Christian Movement for a New Haiti). Several Catholic priests are among the leadership of the Fanmi Lavalas party of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who is himself a former priest. The Conference of Catholic Bishops (CEH) occasionally issues statements on political matters and along with the Protestant Federation, has been an active participant in the search in 2001 for a solution to the political stand off between the President and the opposition. The Director General of the Office of Religious Affairs, a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults, is a Roman Catholic priest.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for the right to practice all religions and faiths, provided that practices does not disturb law and order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The 1987 Constitution grants freedom of religion and directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs administers the relevant laws and is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries. Recognition by the Ministry affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects churches' tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to church documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Registered religious groups are required to submit an annual report of their activities to the Ministry. Although many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official recognition, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement has hampered the operation of a religious group. Goods brought into the country for use by churches and missionaries registered with the Department of Revenue are exempted from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some church organizations have complained that custom officials sometimes refused to honor a church's tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than an attempt to limit religious practices.

For many years, Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the country. While its official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 Concordat, which continues to serve as the basis for relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the State and the operation of Catholic religious orders in the country. In many respects, Roman Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religions. Functions with an official or quasi-official character are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, and certain Catholic holy days are observed officially as national holidays. However, in recent years, the government has recognized the growing role of Protestant churches by, for example, inviting their clergy when the churches are asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Foreign missionaries operate freely. They enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups in order to register with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government to issue them residence permits, there was no indication that such delay was due to deliberate harassment on the part of the authorities.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. This is accepted to mean, among other things, that in parochial schools run by the Catholic Church or one of the Protestant denominations, the school authorities may not permit proselytization on behalf of the church with which the school is affiliated. Parents have been quick to complain and publicize the isolated instances in which this principle has been violated.

Only 15 percent of the country's schools are public. In some of these, Catholic and other clergy play a role in teaching and administration. This is regulated by local authorities on an ad hoc basis. Church-run schools and hospitals are subject to oversight by the Ministries of Education and Health, respectively.

The Government does not interfere with the operation of radio and other media affiliated with religious groups. In addition to the many radio stations operated by religious (mostly Protestant and evangelical) groups, religious programming is a staple of commercial broadcasting.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters, and freely express their personal religious beliefs or affiliation. While society generally is tolerant of the variety of religious practices that flourish in the country, Christian attitudes toward voodoo vary. Many Christians accept voodoo as part of the country's cultural patrimony, but others regard it as incompatible with Christianity, and this has led to isolated instances of conflict in the recent past. Periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups has been managed effectively by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Ministry maintains offices in the central, north, and south areas of the country. Tensions between Protestant and voodoo groups are local in nature and usually involve land disputes and/or conflicts over proselytizing. In some cases, the Ministry sends representatives to assist local authorities in settling such conflicts. Parties to these local conflicts usually accept the Ministry's mediating role.

Ecumenical organizations exist. Interfaith cooperation is perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools (FONHEP).

Particularly in rural areas, accusations of sorcery have been known to lead to mob violence resulting in deaths. Women generally are targeted in these cases, which usually are precipitated by the death of a child by unknown causes. Given the prevalence of voodoo in rural areas, it appears likely that voodoo practitioners are targeted in some of these cases.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy representatives routinely meet with religious officials and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince maintains contact with many American missionaries and is responsive to their concerns.

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## HONDURAS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 43,278 square miles, and its total population is slightly more than 6 million. While no definitive census data is available, the country's mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European) population is estimated at 90 percent of the total, with small numbers of Amerindians, descendants of African slaves, and European settlers making up the rest.

There are no reliable government statistics on the distribution of membership in churches. The Catholic Church reports a total membership of just over 80 percent of the population.

In February and March 1999, the Le Vote company conducted personal interviews on religious issues with persons age 18 or older in 1,330 households distributed throughout the country. The company reported that 60.3 percent of the respondents identified themselves as Catholics, 28.7 percent as evangelical Christians, and 6.8 percent as other; 4.2 percent either did not know or provided no answer. The principal faiths include Roman Catholicism, Judaism, the Greek Orthodox rite, the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mennonite Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), the Union Church, and some 300 evangelical Protestant churches, the most prominent of which include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Grand Commission churches. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Roman Catholic patron saint. The Government consults with the Roman Catholic Church, and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions, on key issues of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives.

The Constitution grants the President the power to grant "juridical personality" to associations, including churches. This personality is a prerequisite to being accorded certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemption. Associations are required to submit an application describing their internal organization, by laws, and goals to the Ministry of Government and Justice. In the case of evangelical churches, the application is then referred to a group of leaders from the "Evangelical Fraternity of Churches" for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the State Solicitor's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. Applications almost always meet these requirements. The President ultimately signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. The Ministry of Government and Justice did not turn down any applications for juridical personality on behalf of a church during the period covered by this report. The Catholic Church and other recognized churches are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain permits to enter and reside in the country. A Honduran institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. Permits generally are granted by the Ministry; the resolution granting residency then is registered with the Directorate General of Population and Migration Policy.

There are religious schools and schools operated by churches; they receive no special treatment from the Government, nor do they face any restrictions.

The law allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud.

The Catholic Church is seeking the return of former properties of historic interest confiscated by the government at independence in 1825; however, the Church has not made a formal request to the Government.



*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

In September 2000 the Congress adopted a controversial measure requiring that, beginning in 2001, all school classes begin with 10 minutes of readings from the Bible. Parents who do not want their children to listen to the readings may notify school authorities in writing. The Education Ministry, in consultation with Christian churches, was to establish procedures to select readings, plan their implementation, and promote their distribution. However, as of end of the reporting period the law had not been implemented. Its constitutionality has been questioned by some legal scholars, and doubts have been raised regarding its eventual implementation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the principal religious communities are amicable. The Catholic Church has designated the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the Archbishop has established an ecumenical and interreligious dialog section within his Archdiocese. Catholic and Protestant churches work together through the private Christian Development Commission.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains a regular dialog with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and nongovernmental religious organizations.

**JAMAICA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law enforcement officials unfairly target them; however, it is not clear whether such complaints reflect discrimination on the basis of religious belief or are due to the group's illegal use of marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 4,243 square miles and its population is approximately 2,652,700.

According to official government statistics compiled during the 1991 census (the latest available figures), 21 percent of the population identify themselves as members of the Church of God, 9 percent as Seventh-Day Adventists, 9 percent as Baptist, 8 percent as Pentecostal, 6 percent as Anglican, 4 percent as Roman Catholic, 3 percent as United Church, 3 percent as Methodist, 2 percent as members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 percent as Moravian, 1 percent as Bretheren, 1 percent unlisted, and 9 percent as "other." (The category "other" includes Hindus, Jews, and Rastafarians.) Of those surveyed, 24 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation. The majority of those who reported no religion were children.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state or dominant religion. However, Rastafarianism is not a recognized religion under the law.

Legal recognition of a religion is facilitated by an act of Parliament, which can act freely to recognize a religious group. Recognized religious groups receive tax-exempt status and other attendant rights, such as the right of prison visits by clergy. In 1983 Rastafarians unsuccessfully lobbied for recognition by Parliament. In December 2000, the Public Defender's Office (newly created to deal with cases for individuals who have had their constitutional rights violated) said that it would bring a case to the Constitutional Court to gain government recognition of Rastafarianism as a religion; however, it had not yet done so as of June 30, 2001. The Public Defender's Office believes that the court's recognition that Rastafarianism fills several criteria for a religion may help the group gain recognition and various rights.

There are religious schools; they are not subject to any special restrictions and do not receive any special treatment from the Government. Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration laws that govern other foreign visitors.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion; however, members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law enforcement officials unfairly target them.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

Members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law enforcement officials unfairly target them; however, it is not clear whether such complaints reflect discrimination on the basis of religious belief or are due to the group's illegal use of marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice. It is alleged that the police force Rastafarian detainees to cut their hair and surreptitiously give them food that they are forbidden to eat. Rastafarians have no right to prison visits by Rastafarian clergy.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country has a well-established tradition of religious tolerance and diversity. Relations among the various religious communities are generally amicable. However, members of the Rastafarian community reported isolated incidents of discrimination against them in schools and the workplace.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## MEXICO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions at the local level.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

A generally amicable relationship among the various religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, in some parts of southern Mexico, political, cultural, and religious tensions continued to limit the free practice of religion within some communities. Most such incidents occurred in the state of Chiapas.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 1,220,663 square miles, and its population is approximately 97.48 million.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Computation (INEGI), 87.99 percent of the respondents in the 2000 census identified themselves at least nominally as Roman Catholic. In 1990 approximately 90 percent did so.

There are an estimated 11,000 Roman Catholic churches, and 14,000 ordained Catholic priests and nuns. An additional estimated 90,000 laypersons work in the Catholic Church system.

Other religious categories enumerated in the 2000 census are: Pentecostal and Neopentecostal evangelicals at 1.62 percent; other Protestant Evangelical groups, 2.87 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants, .71 percent; Seventh-Day Adventists, .58 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), .25 percent; Jewish, .05 percent; and other religions, .31 percent. Press reports have estimated that there are more than 5,000 Protestant churches and 7,000 pastors.

There is no single definitive source on the size of each Protestant denomination. A January 2000 press report indicated that Presbyterians account for 1 percent of the total population; Baptists, 0.1 percent; Methodists, 0.04 percent; Anglicans, 0.1 percent; and Lutherans, 0.01 percent. Official figures sometimes differed from the membership numbers offered by religious groups. For example, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church claims a nationwide membership of 600,000 to 700,000; however, according to the 2000 census only 488,945 persons identified themselves as such. Likewise, some Protestant evangelical groups claim that their coreligionists constitute close to 60 percent of the population in Chiapas state; however, according to the 2000 census only 21.9 percent of respondents in Chiapas identify themselves as Protestant.

In the 2000 census, 3.53 percent of respondents indicated "no religion" and 0.85 percent did not specify a religion.

Of the 5,854 associations registered with the Federal Government, approximately 51 percent are Protestant evangelical and 48.59 percent are non-Protestant Christian, including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox. Non-Christian organizations represent 0.4 percent of all associations registered. A wide variety of Christian foreign missionary groups operate in the country.

The non-Catholic Christian population is concentrated primarily in the south. According to INEGI figures, Chiapas state, with approximately 4 percent of the country's population, has the largest non-Catholic population at 36.2 percent, compared to the national average of approximately 12 percent. The state of Tabasco's non-Catholics represent approximately 29.6 percent of state residents, followed by Campeche state at approximately 28.7 percent and Quintana Roo state at approximately 26.8 percent.

Some indigenous peoples in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatan practice a syncretistic religion that mixes Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan religious beliefs.

In some communities, especially in the south, there is a correlation between political party and religion. Furthermore, whatever their political affiliations, local leaders often manipulate religious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit (see Sections II and III).

Approximately 55 percent of persons surveyed attend religious ceremonies at least once a week; 19 percent, once a month; and 20 percent, less than once a month, according to news reports in 2000.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. State and municipal governments generally protect this right; however, some local officials infringe on religious freedom, especially in the south.

The Constitution states that everyone is free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice the ceremonies and acts of worship of their respective belief. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. The 1992 Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship defines the administrative remedies that protect the right to religious freedom.

Religious associations must register with the Under Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Federal Secretariat of Government (SSAR) in order to operate legally. Although the Government rejects a few applications because of incomplete documentation, the registration process is routine. An estimated 5,854 religious associations are registered. During the period covered by this report, the SSAR had registered 205 associations and rejected 2 applications because they did not meet the registration criteria.

To be registered as a religious association, a group must articulate its fundamental doctrines and religious beliefs, must not be organized primarily to make money, and must not promote acts physically harmful or dangerous to its members.

Religious groups must be registered to apply for official building permits, to receive tax exemptions, and to hold religious meetings outside of their places of worship.

The SSAR promotes religious tolerance and investigates cases of religious intolerance. All religious associations have equal access to the SSAR for registering complaints. SSAR officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among communities. When parties present a religious dispute to the SSAR, it attempts to mediate a solution acceptable to all. If mediation should fail, the parties can submit the problem to the SSAR for binding arbitration. If the parties do not agree to submit to binding arbitration, one or the other may elect to resort to judicial redress. Destruction of property or causing physical harm to other persons are criminal acts and prosecutable under the law. Municipal and state officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among communities. However, when a mediated solution cannot be found, officials are not aggressive in pursuing legal remedies against local leaders (see Section III).

The SSAR investigated 14 cases during 2000 and another 11 during the first half of 2001 and reportedly resolved 11 cases. Of the cases submitted since 1993, 79 remained open at the end of the period covered by this report. The SSAR's new Director of Religious Associations traveled to Chiapas 3 times during the period covered by this report to seek solutions to tensions in various communities. Five states, mostly in the south, have their own under secretaries for religious affairs.

The current situation of religious freedom reflects the historic tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern state. For most of the country's nearly 300 years as a Spanish colony, the Catholic Church involved itself heavily in politics. After independence was won in 1821, the Church's vast wealth and political influence spurred a powerful anticlerical movement that found political expression in the Liberal party. The Catholic Church was opposed to Liberal government policies and supported rebel Conservatives in the mid-19th Century. It later welcomed the country's occupation by a French army. In the early 20th century, the Church's collaboration with the dictator Porfirio Diaz earned it the enmity of the victors in the Mexican Revolution. Consequently, severe restrictions on the rights of the Church and members of the clergy were written into the country's present Constitution. The federal government's attempt to enforce those restrictions in the 1920s led to an open revolt by Catholic peasants and violent Government repression during the 1926-29 Cristero Rebellion.

Tensions between the Church and the State eased after 1940. However, constitutional restrictions were maintained even as enforcement became progressively lax over the ensuing decades. In 1992 the Government reestablished diplomatic relations with the Holy See and lifted almost all restrictions on the Catholic Church. This latter action included granting all religious groups legal status, conceding them limited property rights, and lifting restrictions on the number of priests in the country. However, the law continues to mandate a strict separation of church and state.

Of nine official holidays, two are associated with Christian religious events (Good Friday and Christmas Day). In addition, most employers give holiday leave on Holy Thursday, All Soul's Day, Virgin of Guadalupe Day, and Christmas Eve.

Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools, but religious associations are free to maintain their own private schools, which receive no public funds. Primary level home schooling for religious reasons is neither prohibited nor supported by the law; however, to continue on to a secondary school, one must attend an accredited primary school. The law does not prohibit secondary level home schooling at home.

Religious associations must notify the Government of their intent to hold a religious meeting outside of a licensed place of worship. The Government received 10,629 such notifications during 2000 and the first half of 2001. For the first time, a large scale Protestant evangelical gathering took place in Mexico City's central square on October 14, 2000. According to police, at least 15,000 persons attended, while organizers claimed that 3 times that many were present.

The Government requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or to convert existing buildings into new churches. The Government granted 7,139 such permits between 1992 and August 1998, the period for which most recent statistics are available, and religious groups report no difficulty in obtaining government permission for these activities.

Since assuming office in December 2001, the Secretary of Government has initiated a series of informal dialogs with representatives from various religions to discuss issues of mutual concern. An Interfaith Council, incorporated in 1995, includes official representatives from the Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Mormon, Lutheran, Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh Dharma, and Sufi Islam communities.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Constitution bars clergy from holding public office, advocating partisan political views, supporting political candidates, or opposing the laws or institutions of the State.

To visit the country for religious purposes, foreign religious workers must secure government permission. The federal Government limits the number of visas each religious group is allowed. However, the Government has granted more than 30,000 such visas since 1994.

By law religious associations may not own or administer broadcast radio or television stations; however, the Catholic Church owns and operates a national cable television channel. Government permission is required to transmit religious programming on broadcast radio or television, and permission is granted routinely.

There are reports that municipal officials in Chiapas have suspended Protestant evangelical radio programs, including those of the Adventist Church, on technical and administrative grounds, despite the federal government's issuance of a permit. Local officials reportedly claim that the Adventist Church's permit lacks the proper seal.

On October 16, 2000, the director of a secondary school in Monterrey, state of Nuevo Leon, expelled 16 students for not saluting the national flag. The students, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, refused based on their religious beliefs. The State Education Secretariat and the Nuevo Leon Commission of Human Rights reversed the expulsions.

Any building for religious purposes constructed pursuant to a permit after 1992 is the property of the religious association that built it. All religious buildings erected before 1992 (approximately 85,000) are "national patrimony" and owned by the State. From July 1, 2000 to May 2001, the Government decided 769 property claims in favor of churches, which resulted in religious groups gaining 964 properties. The Government has denied 247 property claims since July 1, 2000 and a total of 2,047 since 1993, because the properties in question were deemed to be owned by the State.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

In parts of Chiapas, local leaders of indigenous communities sometimes regard evangelical groups and Catholic lay catechists as unwelcome outside influences and potential economic and political threats. While religious differences often were a prominent feature of such incidents, ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power were very often the underlying causes of the problems. As a result, these leaders sometimes acquiesced in, or ordered, the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging primarily, but not exclusively, to Protestant evangelical groups. In past years, expulsions involved the burning of homes and crops, beatings, and, occasionally, killings. However, there were no killings reported during the period covered by this report. On several occasions, village officials temporarily detained Evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals.

The Chiapas-based Evangelical Commission for the Defense of Human Rights (CEDEH) claims that municipal authorities have expelled 30,000 persons from their communities in the last 30 years, at least partly on religious grounds. However, this report was not corroborated, and a representative from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) told the press that there are no official statistics on those so displaced.

In late January 2001, local leaders expelled 150 Protestant evangelicals from their homes in Justo Sierra, Chiapas and beat several men, according to the CEDEH. A formal complaint was filed with the state prosecutor's office in Comitán, and on June 27 state judicial police arrested three community officials. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

On April 12, 2001, in the community of San Nicolas, Ixmiquilpan municipality, Hidalgo, more than 30 Protestant Evangelical families were threatened by a local official with expulsion by June 18, 2001, if they did not contribute money and cement blocks to a community celebration. Community members beat three persons as they attempted to videotape the water being cut off to six of these families. In addition, one Evangelical reportedly has received a death threat. Despite community meetings mediated by the SSAR, the dispute had not been resolved by end of the period covered by this report, and the local political leader continued to insist that the Protestant Evangelical families owe "community dues." The deadline for expulsion of the families passed without their eviction, although they remained without water service at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2000, local leaders reportedly detained four Protestant evangelicals in Tres Cruces for failing to pay a customary fine for having converted to a Protestant

faith and for listening to religious music in their home. The detainees were released once the fine was paid.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

*Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

In November 2000, the federal Secretariat of Government signed formal agreements with the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacan, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz to promote prompt, efficient, and coordinated action in religious affairs, particularly in response to conflicts caused by religious intolerance.

Since December 2000, the Secretariat of Government has held more than 80 meetings with the leaders of religious groups in an attempt to become familiar with their concerns. In March and May 2001, the SSAR sponsored workshops for Chiapas state authorities on mediation and arbitration as solutions to religious disputes. At the conclusion of the May workshop, Dr. Alvaro Castro Estrada, the SSAR's Director General of Religious Associations, met with 60 religious leaders in Chiapas to discuss religious tolerance and protections afforded by the law.

In April 2001, the Chiapas state government and the CNDH organized a forum on Tolerance and Religious Diversity in San Cristobal de Las Casas. The SSAR also is cooperating with the CNDH and the National Indigenous Institute (INI) to increase tolerance among communities in the south. On June 13, 2001, these three agencies signed an agreement to cooperate on public education, diagnostic studies on religious disputes, and training and awareness-raising workshops. In addition, the SSAR is exploring ways to involve university law schools in the mediation process in areas of tension.

According to a representative of the Catholic Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, the situation for their foreign visitors improved significantly in 2001. Unlike in previous years, foreign clergy and visitors to the Diocese have been able to arrange their immigration status easily and received prompt attention from the relevant government authorities. For example, Father Loren Riebe, expelled from Chiapas in 1995 along with two other foreign priests, returned to San Cristobal in April 2001 for a conference. The social and political situation in Chiapas remains tense, but the new bishop of San Cristobal, is said to enjoy a more productive relationship with state officials than did his predecessor.

Representatives of Protestant organizations in both Mexico City and Chiapas reported that interfaith understanding has improved at the highest levels, and there were several reports of improvements at the local level. According to CEDEH, syncretist Catholics and Protestant evangelicals in at least 20 parishes are cooperating on development projects that serve their entire communities.

On August 3, 2000, Protestant Evangelical and Catholic representatives in Oaxaca ended 47 years of tension between their communities by signing a peace accord in Santiago Jaltepec. Under this accord, the evangelical community promised to respect the town's religious customs and traditions as well as the local assembly's laws. The Catholic community and local authorities promised to integrate the Evangelists into the local assembly and to respect their constitutional rights and individual freedoms. In addition, development aid that had been confiscated by the local authorities was returned to the evangelical community.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among the various religions; however, there is religious intolerance in, and expulsions from, certain indigenous communities, particularly those in Chiapas, whose residents follow syncretistic (Catholic/Mayan) religious practices (See Section II). Competition for adherents has contributed to tension among various religious groups, particularly in the South. Syncretistic practices are not merely an extension of religious belief, but also the basis for the social and cultural life of the community. Therefore, other religious practices are perceived as different and strange, and also are seen as threats to indigenous culture. Endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and lack of educational opportunities also contribute to tensions in many of these communities. This tension has, at times, resulted in violence. In some southern indigenous communities, abandoning syncretistic practices for Protestant beliefs is perceived as a threat to the unique identity of that community.

In parts of Chiapas, local leaders of indigenous communities sometimes acquiesced in, or ordered, the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging primarily,

but not exclusively, to Protestant evangelical groups (See Section II). Abuses related to these incidents apparently did not occur solely on the basis of religion. While religious differences were often a prominent feature of such incidents, ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power very often were the underlying causes of the problems. The most common incidents of intolerance arose in connection with traditional community celebrations. Protestant evangelicals often resist making financial donations demanded by community norms that will go partly to local celebrations of Catholic religious holidays, and resist participating in festivals involving alcohol.

There were a number of significant cases of religious intolerance caused by societal attitudes during the period covered by this report, the majority of which occurred in Chiapas. For example, about 130 children of Protestant evangelicals have been denied access to the local public schools in 6 communities in the municipality of San Juan Chamula every year since 1994. When local officials investigated, school officials reportedly denied the accusations and claimed that Evangelical parents were not sending their children to school.

Ninety-seven Evangelicals from Icaluntic returned to their homes in 2000 and received compensation for damages; however, the situation remains tense. The Evangelicals reported receiving threats and warnings that they risked being expelled again.

In July 2000, syncretist Catholics expelled 29 Protestant Evangelical families in Plan de Ayala and destroyed 14 of their homes. The state sent 400 police officers to restore order. Syncretists blocked the road to the community and threw stones as the police forced their way through. The state prosecutor pledged to hold accountable those responsible for the expulsions, and the authorities charged 16 individuals with blocking the roadway and injuring 3 police officers. On July 23, state authorities and community representatives signed an agreement allowing the families to return but forcing them to relocate 3 miles away from their original houses. The situation reportedly has calmed considerably but remained tense at the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2000, three persons were detained in Paste for refusing to participate in a local celebration. Members of the syncretistic community burned their homes while the three were in detention. However, this report could not be confirmed.

The Adventist Church reported that individuals in the communities of Vicente Guerrero and Juan Sabines have complained that the opening of an Adventist church in neighboring Francisco I. Madero, Tecpatan municipality would violate local "uses and customs." In March 2001, Francisco I. Madero residents requested local government assistance in relieving tension among the communities and convincing the neighboring communities of the Adventists' right to use their place of worship. This report could not be corroborated.

In May 2001, four other incidents of intolerance were reported, three in Chiapas and one in Puebla state. In two Chiapas communities, Protestant evangelicals reportedly were detained by community members for failing to make financial donations in support of the syncretistic Catholic celebration of Santa Cruz. Adventists in Tapachula were accused of playing loud music in front of Catholic churches while Mass was being conducted, allegedly infringing upon the rights of their neighbors to unimpeded worship. Finally, in a Puebla community, an Adventist pastor was threatened while proselytizing.

Government officials, the national ombudsman, and interfaith groups are conducting discussions about incidents of intolerance in some parts of the south, in order to promote social peace.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Throughout the reporting period Embassy staff have met with government officials, staff of non-governmental organizations, and members of religious groups to discuss and raise religious freedom issues.

Throughout the period covered by this report, Embassy staff met frequently with officials in the Subsecretariat for Religious Affairs within the Secretariat of Government to discuss religious freedom. On trips throughout the country, Embassy staff met religious leaders including the Cardinal of Guadalajara, the Vicar and the Bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, and leaders of the Chiapas-based Buen Samaritano Evangeli Group. The Embassy was in contact with the National Human Rights Commission, the president of the Evangelical Commission in Defense of Human Rights and the Mexican Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference) to discuss religious freedom issues. Embassy staff also visited the Direc-

tor General of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and representatives of U.S. faith-based organizations in Mexico City to become familiar with their concerns.

## NICARAGUA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributes to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 49,997.8 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.8 million.

Over 90 percent of the population belong to one of the Christian denominations. According to the most recent census, conducted in 1995, 72.9 percent of the population were members of the Roman Catholic Church, 15.1 percent were members of evangelical churches, 1.5 percent were members of the Moravian Church, and 0.1 percent were members of the Episcopal Church. An additional 1.9 percent were associated with other churches or religious groups, and 8.5 percent professed no religious affiliation or were atheistic. Some more recent church figures differ from the official census information; for example, the Episcopal Church claims a membership of nearly twice the census figure, and the evangelical churches also have made credible claims of higher current membership.

The total number of citizens who practice a religion other than Christianity is extremely small. There are small communities of non-Christians, including a small Jewish community that gathers for religious holidays and Friday evening dinners but does not have an ordained rabbi or a synagogue. In 1979 many of the country's approximately 250 Jews fled abroad in the face of persecution and imprisonment by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The FSLN bombed and partially destroyed the country's only synagogue, then confiscated the property shortly afterward and converted it into a youth training camp. There is now a funeral home on the site. Some Jews have returned since the Sandinista Government was ousted democratically in 1990, but the total Jewish population of the country consists of fewer than 50 persons.

There is a small number of Muslims as well—primarily foreigners, or naturalized Nicaraguans from Iran, Libya, and Palestine who immigrated to Nicaragua in the 1980's—but there is no mosque.

Minority religions also include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Amish and Mennonite communities, the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Scientology. Although these religions are perceived as foreign, the Government neither monitors them nor alerts the public to their presence.

Other immigrant groups include the "Turcos"—Palestinian Christians whose ancestors came to Central America in the early 1900's, and the Chinese, who came to the country in large numbers shortly after World War II but many of whom fled at the time of the 1979 revolution. Chinese-Nicaraguans either arrived as Christians or converted to Christianity, and intermarried frequently with native Nicaraguans.

There are no longer any pre-Colombian religions in the country, although there is a "freedom movement" within some Moravian churches to allow indigenous Amerindian spiritual expression, often through music. The Catholic Church is the most syncretistic of the denominations and does not criticize or interfere with non-Christian aspects of religious festivals held in its name. For example, each August up to 30,000 persons—many of them painted red or coated in motor oil—gather to carry "Dominguito," a sacred 10-inch statue of Saint Dominic, from his home church in a suburb of Managua to another church downtown. A week later the revelers reconvene to carry the statue back. Such events have historical roots that go back to pre-Colombian times.

Geographically Moravian and Episcopal communities are concentrated on the Atlantic coast, while Catholicism and evangelical churches dominate the Pacific and central regions. There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion: blacks



and Amerindians, generally from the Atlantic coast, are more likely to belong to the Moravian or Episcopal Church. Some evangelical churches have focused on the booming, remote towns of the central South Atlantic Region and have a strong presence there.

The evangelical churches are growing rapidly, especially in poor and/or remote areas. For example, in 1980 the Assemblies of God had 80 churches and fewer than 5,000 members. According to church leader Saturnino Cerato, as of May 15, 2001, they had 730 churches and approximately 124,000 baptized members.

Anecdotal evidence points to proportionally higher church attendance among members of the new evangelical churches than among members of the Catholic and traditional Protestant churches. In the poorer neighborhoods, the small evangelical churches are filled to capacity nearly every evening. According to a Catholic Church official, the Catholic Church is growing numerically but losing ground proportionally.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country. The Mormons have 178 missionaries, the Unification Church has 6 families of missionaries, and nearly all of the non-Catholic denominations have at least 1 missionary family in the country.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution also states that no one “shall be obligated by coercive measures to declare their ideology or beliefs.”

The Roman Catholic Church is not an official state religion; however, it enjoys a close relationship with the secular Government. The Roman Catholic Church is the most politically active religious denomination and has significant political influence. Catholic Church leaders routinely meet with senior government officials. The historical position of the Church is such that most religiously affiliated monuments and memorials are Catholic-related. However, the predominance of the Catholic Church does not impact negatively on the religious freedom of others.

The Government’s requirements for legal recognition of a church are similar to its requirements for other nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s). A church must apply for “Personeria Juridica” (legal standing), which must be approved by the National Assembly. Following Assembly approval, a church must register with the Ministry of Government as an association or a foundation.

A recognized church can be granted tax-exempt status, known as exoneration. Exonerated churches are exempt from customs duties on imported goods donated for humanitarian purposes. Goods donated to established churches and other nonprofit religious organizations recognized by the Government, and that are intended for the exclusive use of the church or organization, are eligible for exonerated status. Prior to 1997, the Government provided exonerated churches with a letter confirming their tax-exempt status. A church could obtain customs clearance for imported donated goods by presenting its exemption letter. However, in 1997 the Government implemented a new customs regime that required clearance from the Office of External Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Office, and the municipality in which the donated goods would be used before a tax exemption could be approved and the goods released.

A number of churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, including the Lutheran Church, the Moravian Church, and the Council of Evangelical Churches, reported bureaucratic delays in obtaining exonerated status from customs duties for humanitarian aid in the form of donated goods. Some non-Catholic churches complained that the Catholic Church was receiving favored treatment in this regard and in practice did not face the same bureaucratic requirements applied to other religious and humanitarian organizations. However, some Catholic groups, including Catholic Relief Services, reported similar bureaucratic problems in obtaining exonerated status from duties on donated goods. The Government published additional, more specific guidelines in April and June 1999 in an attempt to address these problems, but the issue remained controversial during the period covered by this report.

Missionaries do not face any special requirements other than the appropriate visa—the “religious worker” visa—which is given freely to everyone who follows the application guidelines. The process of obtaining a religious worker visa takes several months and must be completed before the missionary arrives in the country. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of difficulties by missionaries in obtaining the proper visa.

Private religious schools operate in the country. The Government provides financial support to a number of primary and secondary schools owned and directed by the Catholic Church by paying the salaries of teachers at these schools.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among religions are very different on the two coasts. On the Atlantic side, where the three dominant churches are the Moravian, Episcopal, and Catholic Churches, there is an ecumenical spirit. The churches even are known to celebrate the Eucharist together. However, on the Pacific side, ecumenism is rare, and there is continuing and energetic competition for adherents between the Catholic Church and the evangelical churches.

Both the Catholic bishops and the leading evangelical leaders showed signs of a desire to work together more closely during the period covered by this report. In October 2000, Catholic Church officials, evangelical pastors, and others organized a highly publicized march against legalized abortion. The Catholic and evangelical leaders were working together to prevent the passage of a legislative bill legalizing abortion. Thus far, the legislation has not been approved.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights, and also maintains a regular dialog with the principal religious leaders and organizations.

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**PANAMA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, with some qualifications; however, the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 30,193 square miles and its population is an estimated 2.8 million.

According to a 1998 nationwide survey by the Comptroller General's Office of Statistics and Census, 82 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 10 percent as evangelical, and 3 percent as unaffiliated with any religious group. There are also small but statistically identifiable congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalians, and other Christians. Many recent Chinese immigrants still practice Buddhism. The country has small but influential Jewish and Muslim communities, and is home to one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship.

Many religious organizations have foreign religious workers in Panama. For example, as of June 1999, the Southern Baptist Convention had 22 foreign missionaries in Panama, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) had 197.

Foreign missionaries are granted temporary 3-month religious worker visas upon submitting required paperwork, which includes an HIV/AIDS test and a police certificate of good conduct. A 1-year extension customarily is granted with the submission of additional, less onerous, documentation. Foreign religious workers who in-

tend to remain in the country more than 15 months must repeat the entire process. Such additional extensions usually are granted.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for free exercise of all religious beliefs, provided that “Christian morality and public order” are respected; however, despite the qualified nature of this right, the Government generally respects religious freedom in practice.

The Constitution recognizes Roman Catholicism as “the religion of the majority of Panamanians” but does not designate the Roman Catholic Church as the official state religion. Roman Catholicism’s numerical predominance and “unofficial” recognition by the Constitution generally has not prejudiced other religions. However, Catholicism does enjoy certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Panama—but no other religious leader—enjoys privileges and immunities usually reserved for government officials.

The Constitution provides that religious associations have “juridical capacity” and are free to manage and administer their property within the limits prescribed by the law, the same as other “juridical persons.” The Ministry of Government and Justice grants “juridical personality” through a relatively simple, transparent process that does not appear to prejudice religious institutions. Juridical personality allows a religion to apply for the full array of tax benefits available to nonprofit organizations. There were no reports of cases in which religious organizations were denied juridical personality or the associated tax benefits.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Foreign missionaries are granted temporary 3-month religious worker visas upon submitting required paperwork, which includes an AIDS test and a police certificate of good conduct. A 1-year extension customarily is granted with the submission of additional, less onerous, documentation. Foreign religious workers who intend to remain in the country more than 15 months must repeat the entire process. Such additional extensions usually are granted. Catholic religious workers from outside the country benefit from a streamlined administrative process that grants them 5-year work permits.

The Panamanian General Directorate for Immigration and Naturalization no longer grants religious worker visas or work permits to members of the Unification Church. Officials based their decision on allegedly deceptive religious worker visa applications, as well as certain Unification Church practices (such as mass marriages) that officials believed ran contrary to the constitutional requirement that religious conduct respect Christian morality. The Unification Church has not appealed the decision.

The Constitution dictates that Catholicism be taught in public schools, although parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction.

The Constitution disadvantages ministers of religious faiths in general by strictly limiting the type of public offices they may hold. The Constitution prohibits clerics from holding public office, except as related to social assistance, education, or scientific research.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### *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 Government’s refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the different, mostly Christian, faiths are generally harmonious. The Roman Catholic Church, despite losing membership through growing defections to evangelical and other Christian churches, generally has not reacted defensively. Similarly, most Protestant groups active in the country are not militantly anti-Catholic. Aggressive evangelical Protestant criticism of “new” religions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses), is not widespread.

For the past 17 years, mainstream denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches, have participated in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. The Committee sponsors interreligious conferences to discuss matters of faith and practice and plans joint liturgical celebrations and charitable projects. In conjunc-

tion with the University of Santa Maria la Antigua, the Committee sponsors the Institute for Ecumenism and Society, which conducts its own conferences and issues ecumenical publications. The Ecumenical Committee is also a member of the Panamanian Civil Society Assembly, an umbrella group of civic organizations that conducts informal governmental oversight and has been the driving force behind ethical pacts on the treatment of women and youth, civil society, responsible journalism, and decentralization.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials also have met with religious leaders to discuss human rights and the promotion of democracy and civil society.

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## PARAGUAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 158,886 square miles, and its population is approximately 5,586,000 persons (2000 estimate).

An estimated 90 percent of the population are Roman Catholic. There are active Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical Christian, Jewish (both Orthodox and Reform congregations), Mormon, Muslim, and Baha'i communities in the country. There also are sizable Mennonite communities, whose members originally came to the country in order to escape religious persecution. These communities came to the country in several waves between 1880 and 1950.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion for all persons, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

All religious groups must be registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture, but the Government imposes no controls on these groups and many informal churches exist.

The Government is secular. Most government officials are Christian. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding. Adherence to a particular creed confers no legal advantage or disadvantage, and foreign and local missionaries proselytize freely.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

##### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While there is no large-scale ecumenical movement in the country, all religious groups freely exercise their beliefs in a largely tolerant environment. The Catholic

Church often performs Mass for government functions, Protestant and evangelical churches engage in marches and prayer vigils, and part of the Jewish community holds a large public menorah lighting every year for Hannukah.

The Catholic Church is involved in politics at the fringe, mostly in socio-economic matters, and does not support any particular political party. The Church freely criticizes the Government.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials meet regularly with representatives of different religious groups.

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### PERU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Constitution recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." Preferential treatment given to the Catholic Church in education, tax benefits, and other areas continued to raise concerns about potential infringements of religious liberties of non-Catholics. In December 2000, approximately 90 members of various non-Catholic churches lost a case pending before the Supreme Court challenging mandatory religious education in public schools by teachers appointed by the Catholic dioceses.

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 798,635 square miles and its population is approximately 27,013,000. Nearly all major religions and religious organizations are represented in the country. The Cuanto Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides demographic information, estimates that approximately 80 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholics, although an official of the Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only about 15 percent of the country's Roman Catholics attend church services on a weekly basis. Approximately 7.5 percent of the population identify themselves as Protestant, the majority of which are Pentecostal or evangelical. This 7.5 percent also includes non-evangelical Christians such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The 1993 census (the latest official figures available) found that adherents of non-Christian religions, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Shintoists, accounted for less than 0.3 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constituted 1.4 percent of the population.

There are a number of Catholics who combine native indigenous worship with the Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the highlands.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Mormons and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution establishes the separation of church and state; however, the Constitution recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The State thus maintains a close relationship with the Church and grants it a privileged status. The dominant status accorded to Roman Catholicism in public life manifests itself in various ways.

All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. Religious denominations or churches are not required to register with the Government or apply for a license. There is a small Religious Affairs Unit within the Ministry of Justice whose primary purpose is to receive institutional complaints of discrimination from the various churches. This unit also ensures that beyond the historic preferences (subsidies and exemptions granted to the Catholic Church only), all denominations and churches receive a variety of financial benefits, such as exemption from certain import taxes and customs duties for which they are eligible. The Unit did not receive any discrimination complaints during the period covered by this report.

Roman Catholicism, the Catholic Church, and Catholic clergy receive preferential treatment and tangible benefits from the State in the areas of education, taxation of personal income, remuneration, and taxation of institutional property.

Conversion from one religion to another is respected, and missionaries are allowed to enter the country and proselytize. Some non-Catholic missionary groups claim that a law discriminated against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles, that they bring in to the country, while the Catholic Church has not been taxed on such items.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Real estate, buildings, and houses owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes. Two groups of Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the compensation paid them by the Catholic Church. These include the country's 52 bishops as well as those priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. Finally, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to church officials, none of these payments are substantial. However, the Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors the strict separation between church and state and opposes the preferential treatment accorded to the Catholic religion, claims that the financial subsidies and tax benefits are far more widespread and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. PROLIBCO also has alleged government discrimination against non-Catholic groups that must pay import duties and a sales tax on Bibles brought into the country. In May the Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that the Government denied them tax-exemption for imported donations of Bibles and other religious educational materials.

Since 1977 the Ministry of Education has required Catholic religious teaching as part of public and private primary school curriculum. Some non-Catholic or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. In April 1998, the Government issued an executive order that established basic Catholic religion courses for all primary school students. In 1999 the Education Ministry issued a directive to implement a 1998 decree that made it mandatory for school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding bishop of the local diocese.

Parents who do not wish their children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. Such requests are granted infrequently. Non-Catholics who wish their children to receive a religious education in their own faith are free to organize such classes, at their own expense, during the weekly hour allotted by the school for religious education, but must supply their own teacher. PROLIBCO objects to the requirement for Catholic teaching in the school curriculum, and claims that the alternatives available to non-Catholic parents violate the constitutional protection of privacy and confidentiality of one's convictions and beliefs. PROLIBCO led a challenge by approximately 90 persons from various non-Catholic churches to this education practice in the Supreme Court and lost the case in December 2000. In May PROLIBCO presented its case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The results of the IACHR were pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among members of the various religions generally are amicable. Religious groups occasionally join forces in ecumenical works on behalf of the poor. The Catholic and evangelical churches collaborate closely in the area of human rights.

The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and the National Evangelical Council of Peru (through its loosely affiliated, although independent, Peace and Hope Evangelical Association) have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and prisoners wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason.

The Catholic Church is the most politically active religious denomination and has significant political influence. During the period covered by this report, at the request of the Government and because of the Church's reputation for honesty, prominent members of the Church played a pivotal role in democratization and anticorruption initiatives.

Unlike in previous years, during the period covered by this report there were no reports of incidents of anti-Semitism and discrimination. In the past, Jewish community leaders in Lima have claimed that a number of the capital city's most prestigious private social clubs have refused to accept into their ranks prospective Jewish members.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. During the period covered by this report, embassy staff members met with leaders of many of the religious communities, including representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and Protestant leaders. In addition, the Embassy maintains regular contact with religious and nonreligious organizations that are involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

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**ST. KITTS AND NEVIS**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

St. Kitts and Nevis, a two-island federation, located at the northern end of the Leeward island chain of the West Indies has a total land area of 104 square miles. Its overall population is approximately 41,570, with an estimated 34,800 persons on St. Kitts 68 square miles and an estimated 6,770 persons on Nevis' 36 square miles. Approximately 96 percent of the population are of African descent with most adhering to the Anglican belief. Racially diverse minority worshippers are members of Catholic, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah Witnesses, Rastafarian and other faiths or beliefs.

The dominant religion is Christianity (mostly Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Moravian), but religious freedom for others is not affected adversely. There is a Baha'i minority.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular, but most government officials are Christian. The Government does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. Christian holy

days, such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays. The Government does not take any steps to promote interfaith understanding.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The Federation's citizens have a history of being open and tolerant of all faiths. Although the society is dominated by Christian attitudes, values, and mores, citizens respect the rights of followers of minority religions such as Baha'is, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**ST. LUCIA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

St. Lucia is an island with a total area of 238 square miles and a population of approximately 138,000. The dominant religion is Christianity, and some 80 percent of the island's residents are Roman Catholic. There also are Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witnesses communities. Small minority religions include the Baha'i Faith and Rastafarianism.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular, but most government officials are Christian. The Government does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. Christian holy days such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

In September 2000, customs authorities temporarily detained a visiting publisher entering the country after seizing a number of books he was carrying that reflected religious themes. Book titles included: *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, *The Greater Key of Solomon*, *The Lost Books of the Bible*, and *The Ancient Mysteries of Melchizedek*. The books were seized and reviewed under laws that ban importing immoral or pornographic materials.



*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

On December 31, 2000, two men, alleged to be members of the Rastafarian movement, attacked a Sunday Mass in a Catholic Church. They killed a nun, set the priest on fire, and wounded 12 other persons. The authorities charged the men with murder and arson. The trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. Rastafarian leaders criticized the attack, and Archdiocese representatives criticized what they termed “an atmosphere of intolerance” and a “callous disrespect for authority” in the country. The Government criticized the attack as the work of mentally disturbed persons who underscored the plight of “impoverished and marginalized youth” alienated from societal norms.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government’s refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. The St. Lucia Christian Council conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

**ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change to the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The island of St. Vincent and a chain of smaller islands, the Grenadines, have a total area of 150 square miles; the population is approximately 108,000. The dominant religion is Christianity (Anglican, Seventh-Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Pentecostal). The minority religions are Islam, the Baha’i Faith, and Rastafarianism.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and most government officials are Christian, but the Government does not interfere with an individual’s right to worship. Christian holy days such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. Members of the Rastafarian community have complained that law officials unfairly target them. However, it is not clear whether such complaints reflect

discrimination on the basis of religious belief by authorities or simply enforcement of laws against marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. However, some members of society do not regard Rastafarianism favorably because of its popular association with drug use. The Christian Council of Churches conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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**SURINAME**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 63,037 square miles, and its population is approximately 450,000.

Slightly over one-third of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, another third is of African descent, another fifteen to twenty percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and there are smaller percentages of the population that claim Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, and Dutch ancestry. Religious diversity in the country closely parallels the ethnic diversity of the population.

According to government statistics, 45 percent of the population is Christian (23 percent Roman Catholic, 16 percent Moravian, and 6 percent other denominations such as Lutheran, Dutch Reformed and the Evangelical Churches), 27 percent is Hindu, 20 percent is Muslim, 6 percent follow native religions, and 2 percent claim no faith.

A large number of faiths, including U.S.-based church groups, have established missionary programs throughout the country. It is estimated that nearly 90 percent of the American missionaries are affiliated with the Baptist Church, with a small percentage of followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) also present. There are several groups of Druids. In addition to U.S.-based groups, there are international groups such as the World Islamic Call Society and the Baha'i Faith.

Many political parties have strong ethnic ties, and religious beliefs often follow ethnic lines; therefore, some political parties are predominantly made up of one faith. However, all political parties have members of different religions, and there is no requirement that political party leaders or members must follow a particular religion.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this

right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion.

Members of all the various faiths in the country are allowed to worship freely. Religions are not required to register with the Government.

The military maintains a chaplaincy that performs inter-faith services in Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism. Military members are also welcome to visit other religious services in town.

Aside from the standard requirement for an entry visa, missionary workers face no special governmental restrictions. The Government has encouraged and, where possible, supported the various groups without showing special preference to any one group in particular.

The government education system provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by the various religious faiths. While the teachers at the schools are civil servants, and the schools are considered public schools, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the country's various religious communities are amicable. Most citizens, especially those living in Paramaribo, celebrate the religious holidays of other groups to varying extents.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The status of religious freedom improved with the passage of a bill that removes criminal offenses relating to certain religious practices.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 1,980 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million.

There is no dominant faith among the multiethnic population, which is 40 percent African and 40 percent East Indian; the remainder are of European, Syrian, Lebanese, and Chinese descent. According to the latest official statistics (1990), about 29 percent of the population are practicing or nominally Roman Catholic; 24 percent are Hindu; 6 percent are Muslim; and 31 percent are Protestant (including 11 percent Anglican, 7 percent Pentecostal, 4 percent Seventh-Day Adventist, 3 percent Presbyterian/Congregational, and 3 percent Baptist). A small number of individuals follow Obeah and other traditional Caribbean religions with African roots; sometimes these are practiced together with other faiths.

Foreign missionaries present include members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Mennonites, and Muslims. The Mormons maintain the maximum total allowed (30) of foreign missionaries per religious denomination in the country, while other denominations maintain between 5 and 10 foreign missionaries.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

To receive tax-exempt donations or gifts of land, religious groups must register with the Government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, whether or not they are registered. They can own land but must pay property taxes, and they can hire employees but must pay for government-mandated employee benefits.

The 1999 Orisa Marriage Act allows registered marriage officers of Orisa faith to conduct marriages, which are recognized as legally binding by the Government. Previously only Christian, Hindu, and Moslem prelates could be licensed marriage officers.

There is a limit of 30 foreign missionaries per religious denomination.

The Government subsidizes religious and public schools. It also permits religious instruction in public schools, setting aside a time each week when any religious organization that has an adherent in the school can provide an instructor in its faith. Attendance at these classes is voluntary.

Following national elections in December 2000, Prime Minister Basdeo Panday reorganized several ministries and added to the Ministry of Education the portfolio of moral, ethical, and spiritual values.

Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally take care not to favor any one religion publicly. The Government has set aside public holidays for every religion with significant followings, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, as well as for the relatively small number of Baptists.

The Government does not formally sponsor programs that promote interfaith dialog; however, it supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), which brings together representatives from most of the country's religions. The IRO, which was formed about 30 years ago by several religious leaders, is called upon routinely to provide the prayer leader for several official events, such as the opening of parliament and of the annual court term.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. Foreign missionaries operate relatively freely in the country; however, the Government limits the number of foreign missionaries allowed to enter the country to 30 per religious denomination. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa, must represent a registered religious group, and cannot remain in the country for more than 3 years.

The Government is known to monitor closely only one religiously affiliated group, a radical Muslim organization called the Jamaat al Muslimeen, some members of which attempted a coup in 1990. The Government's surveillance has focused on the group's repeated attempts to seize control of state-owned property adjoining its central mosque and on any actions intended to incite revolt. In January 2001, a court ordered the Jamaat to pay the Government more than \$3 million for damage done to public buildings during the 1990 coup attempt. In May 2001, the court ruled on a counter-suit and awarded the Jamaat approximately \$350,000 for destruction of its facilities during the same coup.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

*Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

In October 2000, the legislature passed a Government-sponsored Equal Opportunities Bill, which prohibits acts that offend or insult another person or group on the grounds of race, origin, or religion, or which incite racial or religious hatred. Previously the law, a legacy of British colonialism, protected only Christian groups from blasphemous libel.

In November 2000, Parliament passed a separate bill, the Miscellaneous Laws Act, that amended certain provisions of existing legislation that had discriminated against the religious practices of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist and Orisa faiths. This Act removes references to "church" and "chapel" and replaces them with the term "buildings set apart for religious worship." Similarly, the terms "clergyman or

minister” are replaced by “religious head or official.” Criminal statutes also have been amended to remove references to Obeah and to “beating drums, blowing horns, and dancing in a street, highway or other place,” which discriminated against certain religious practices. The Act also repeals the authority given to police to enter any location to investigate and arrest persons practicing Orisa or Shouter Baptist worship rituals, protects all religions against blasphemy, and provides for prosecution of the desecration of any place of worship.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country’s various religious groups peacefully coexist and generally respect each other’s beliefs and practices. Followers of one faith often participate in public celebrations of another faith, most notably in the Hindu celebration of Divali. The IRO, which is composed of leaders from all faiths with significant followings except for the Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Mormons (who have not expressed an interest in membership because of doctrinal differences), promotes interfaith dialog and tolerance through study groups, publications, and cultural and religious shows and exhibitions. No group is excluded from membership in the IRO.

Complaints occasionally are made about the efforts of some groups to proselytize in neighborhoods where another religion is dominant. The most frequent public complaints have been lodged by Hindu religious leaders against evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Such clashes mirror the racial tensions that at times arise between the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian communities.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## URUGUAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 68,000 square miles and its population is estimated at 3.2 million. Over one-half of the population lives in Montevideo and surrounding areas. About 52 percent of the population are practicing or nominally Roman Catholic, 16 percent are Protestant or belong to another Christian denomination, approximately 1 percent are Jewish, and 30 percent are members of other religions or profess no religion.

The mainstream Protestant minority is composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and groups include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) claims 65,000 members. There are approximately 30,000 practicing Jews who support 15 synagogues.

A 1998 poll revealed that 13 percent of the population identified themselves as atheists or agnostics, with a significant percentage identifying themselves as deists. Some of the country’s 6 percent African-Uruguayan population, primarily those with roots in Brazil, practice animism.

The Unification Church is active in the country and has major property holdings. There also is a Muslim population that lives primarily on the border with Brazil. Approximately 4,000 Baha’is live in Montevideo.

Many Christian groups perform missionary work in the country. For example, the Mormons have approximately 365 missionaries in the country at any one time.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIONS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is a strict separation of church and state, which dates from the beginning of the 20th century. Under the influence of reformist President Jose Batlle y Ordonez, religious instruction in the schools was banned in 1909, and separation of church and state was included in the 1917 Constitution and reaffirmed in the current 1967 Constitution. All religions are entitled to receive tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. Houses of worship must register to get tax exemptions. To do so, a religion or minority religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and grants religious status. The group must reapply every 5 years. Once it has status granted to it by the Ministry, it can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. The public schools allow students who belong to minority religions to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private schools, mainly Catholic and Jewish, to serve their respective religious communities.

The Government does not take any steps to promote interfaith understanding. Missionaries face no special requirements or restrictions.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities are amicable. The Christian-Jewish Council meets regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant religions meet regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church.

Isolated neo-Nazi elements have carried out occasional, limited attacks since 1997. Law enforcement authorities have responded vigorously to such activities. In September 2000, the police arrested and charged with inciting racial hatred the leader of a small neo-Nazi group believed responsible for distributing pro-Nazi propaganda. Because this was the suspect's first offense, he benefited from a general amnesty applied to first offenders and after spending several months in jail, was released in late 2000 and the case against him provisionally was closed.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

During the period covered by this report, embassy staff members met with human rights and religious nongovernmental organizations and with leaders of many of the religious communities, including representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and Mormon and Protestant leaders.

The Embassy maintains frequent contact with religious and nonreligious organizations that are involved in the protection of human rights, such as the Center for Documentation, Investigation, and Social and Pastoral Promotion (OBSUR), Service of Peace and Justice (SERPAJ), Ecumenical Service for Human Dignity (SEOHU), Institute for Legal and Social Studies of Uruguay (ILSUR), and Mundo Afro, which represents the interests of citizens of African descent.

## VENEZUELA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 350,000 square miles and its population is approximately 24.5 million. According to the latest government figures, in 2000 approximately 70 percent of the population were Roman Catholic, approximately 29 percent were Protestant, and the remaining 1 percent practiced other religions or were atheists. There are small but influential Muslim and Jewish communities. The capital city of Caracas has a large mosque, and the country's Jewish community is very active. According to the Government, Protestant churches are the country's most rapidly growing religious community.

There are approximately 4,000 foreign missionaries working in the country.

### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, and the public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Ministry of Interior and Justice is the government office responsible for maintaining a registry of religious groups, disbursing funds to the Roman Catholic Church, facilitating the travel of missionaries and religious officials, and promoting awareness and understanding among the various religious communities. Each local church must register with the DJR in order to hold legal status as a religious organization and to own property. The requirements for registration are largely administrative. However, some groups have complained that the process of registration is slow and inefficient.

In 1964 the Government and the Holy See signed a concordat that underscores the country's historical ties to the Roman Catholic Church and provides government subsidies to the Church, including to its social programs and schools. Other religious groups do not receive such subsidies.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion. However, the Catholic Church receives subsidies not granted to other churches, and there are some restrictions on the legal rights of religious groups.

The Government annually provides over \$1.5 million (approximately 1.1 billion bolivars) in subsidies to the Catholic Church's schools and social programs. Other religious groups are free to establish and run their own schools, which do not receive subsidies from the Government.

The Catholic Church has expressed concern that a new program for government-provided itinerant school supervisors could, in theory, become involved in the operation of private religious schools, under the provisions of an October 2000 decree by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports. However, as of the end of the period covered by this report, this decree has had no impact on the operation of private religious schools.

In May 2001, representatives of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Churches rejected participation in the newly created "Interreligious Parliament of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" (PIV), a government-organized group of numerous religious organizations whose stated purpose is to coordinate their social programs. In a statement released on May 10, Catholic Church representatives expressed concerns for the Church's autonomy and claimed that the PIV appeared to be an effort to centralize unduly the social work of various churches and religions.

On November 21, 2000, as part of a broader ruling on whether certain entities qualify as members of the Government's definition of civil society, the Supreme Court ruled that religious organizations are not part of civil society, and that as such they may not represent Venezuelan citizens in court nor bring their own legal

actions. The Catholic Church expressed concern over this ruling; however, as of the end of the period covered by this report, this ruling had had no impact in practice on Church activities.

Foreign missionaries require a special visa to enter the country, which is obtained through the DJR. Missionaries generally are not refused entry, but many complain that the DJR often takes months or years to process a request due to general bureaucratic inefficiency.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

On several occasions, the Roman Catholic Church has been monitored or threatened by state agents for political reasons; however, there were no such cases reported during the period covered by this report.

The radio station operated by the diocese of Coro had no further problems with the authorities during the period covered by this report. In 1999 two military intelligence agents allegedly warned that they would be monitoring and recording future broadcasts following the broadcast of statements made by the Bishop of Coro against the new Constitution.

There was no reported progress in the official investigation into the April 2000 videotaping by State Security Police (DISIP) agents of a Mass said by Monsignor Baltazar Porras, the president of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV). Monsignor Porras previously had criticized the Government publicly on a number of issues, including a lack of electoral transparency, supraconstitutional activities of the National Legislative Commission, and the Government's rejection of some international aid during devastating floods at the end of 1999. Following the videotaping incident, the Director of DISIP immediately apologized and the agent was suspended. Bishops also had reported receiving telephone threats during the CEV's assembly at that time.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities generally are amicable.

There are numerous ecumenical groups throughout the country.

The Catholic Church is a vocal participant in the national political debate.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy maintains close contacts with the various religious communities and meets periodically with the DJR. The Ambassador meets regularly with religious authorities, and the Embassy facilitates communication between U.S. religious groups and the Government.