

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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, and its population is approximately 67,448. A significant percentage of the population represents citizens of other Caribbean nations and the percentage of citizens from China is growing. 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 strives to protect 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. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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. Government 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.

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. There are a number of governmental and nongovernmental efforts to reduce discrimination and promote interfaith understanding.

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 36.9 million. 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). In April 2001, statistics provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief indicated the following estimated membership in religious communities, which does not necessarily signify the practice of the religion: Catholics—88 percent of the population; Protestants—7 percent; Muslims—1.5 percent; Jews—1 percent; others—2.5 percent. However, accurate estimates of the religious affiliations of the population are difficult to obtain. The available estimates often are based on outdated census data and questionable presumptions, including a presumption that persons of Middle Eastern ethnic origin are Muslims. Estimates of the number of Jews vary between 180,000 and 450,000 persons. The Israeli-Argentina Mutual Association (AMIA) had not undertaken its planned demographic study of Jewish community members by the end of the reporting period.

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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution grants all residents the right “to profess their faith freely,” and 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. Registration is not required for private religious practices, such as those conducted in homes, but registration is necessary for any public activities. 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 were 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 conducted in the school itself or at a religious institution, as circumstances warrant. Many churches and synagogues operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

In April, the military signed an agreement incorporating the Anti-Defamation League's educational materials on anti-Semitism and racism into the military schools' curriculum. Fernando Maurette, Vice-Minister of Defense, led the campaign and explained that the agreement is intended to improve the military's reputation, which many in the Jewish community still associate with Nazi sympathies.

The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an independent agency of the Government, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes (see Section III). INADI, which includes representatives from the major religious faiths on its board, 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 conducts educational programs. In the past, INADI has suffered from lack of funding and institutional instability. However, in 2002 a president was named, as INADI's formal law directs, and a process to establish autonomy began but had not reached completion by the end of the reporting period. Nevertheless, INADI continued to investigate discrimination complaints, support victims, and promote proactive measures to prevent discrimination.

In January 2000, President De la Rúa committed the Government to implementing a Holocaust Education Project to be conducted under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force (ITF). At the June 2002 meeting of the ITF, Argentina became a full member of the Task Force and, as part of its contribution to promoting ITF objectives and expanding Holocaust education, the Government held a Holocaust Education Seminar for teachers in Tucuman province in November 2002.

The law provides for 3 days of excused and paid leave for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and the Islamic holy days of the Muslim New Year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 administered by the Secretariat of Worship. Such subsidies historically have totaled between \$2.8 and 3.6 million (8 and 10 million pesos) per year.

Some members of the non-Roman Catholic communities perceive religious discrimination in the military service and in some federal ministries. Representatives of the Jewish community have claimed in the past that few if any Jewish citizens chose 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 such assertions, current and past administrations have included Jewish government ministers and other senior government officials.

In late 2002, a gubernatorial candidacy brought to light that the oath of office of the Province of Tucuman provided for the governor to swear on the "Holy Gospels." A legal challenge to the provision resulted in a provincial Supreme Court ruling that the governor could instead swear by "God and the Fatherland."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In early March, the judge heading the ongoing investigation of the 1994 AMIA Jewish community center bombing, in which 85 victims perished, issued an international arrest order for 4 Iranian officials suspected of planning the terrorist attack. They included former cultural attaché Moshen Rabanni, diplomatic courier Barat Balesh Abadi, Iranian intelligence minister Ali Fallahian, and diplomat Ali Akbar Parvaresh. In mid-May the judge requested the arrest of another suspect, Lebanese national Imad Mugnyeh, whom the Government already sought as a suspect in the 1982 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. Brazilian national, Wilson dos Santos, who recanted his claim to have warned consulates in Rome of the AMIA bombing, was convicted of perjury, sentenced to 6 years in prison, and released for time served in March. The trial of 15 Buenos Aires provincial police and 5 civilians, charged as local accessories to the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center, continued and is expected to last at least through the end of the year. The new Government of President Nestor Kirchner has publicly identified resolution of the 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing and the 1994 AMIA bombing as key priorities. Presidents Duhalde and Kirchner have taken concrete actions to promote the investigation into the bombings, which include providing an intelligence report to facilitate the judge's investigation, giving permission to open sealed intel-

ligence service files and allowing agents from the State Intelligence Secretariat to testify in court.

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 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. NGOs actively promote interfaith understanding. Ecumenical attendance is common at important religious events, such as the Jewish community's annual Holocaust commemoration.

NGOs promoting religious fraternity include the Argentine Jewish-Christian Brotherhood, an affiliate of the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom (CALIR), the Foundation for Education for Peace (FEDEPAZ), and the Federation of Arab Entities (Latin America), known as FEARAB. Cooperation has been particularly notable between FEARAB (Latin America), representing Muslims and Christians of Arab origin, and DAIA, the political representation of Argentine Jewry, to prevent religious tensions stemming from political conflicts in the Middle East. For example, on February 20, FEARAB, DAIA and the Government issued a joint declaration calling attention to their traditional harmonious relationship and their approval of Argentina's position of support for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts.

Religious discrimination remains a problem. Most published reports of antireligious acts involved anti-Semitic activity, although there were also reports of isolated anti-Muslim and anti-Christian acts. INADI works to combat religious discrimination and other forms of intolerance (see Section II).

A number of reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents surfaced during the period covered by this report. The DAIA Center for Social Studies publishes an annual study on Anti-Semitism in Argentina. The Center found the total number of anti-Semitic incidents dropped from 185 in 2001 to 149 in 2002. Of the 149 incidents, 35 percent were anti-Semitic remarks, 23 percent anti-Semitic graffiti, and 9 percent were threats against Jewish individuals or institutions. The issues the DAIA Center highlighted in its 2002 report included: 1) the display and sale of an anti-Semitic tract from the 1930s at a Catholic book fair in La Plata in October/November 2002; 2) the Foreign Ministry's appointment and later withdrawal of that appointment of a "special representative" for themes related to the Jewish Community; and 3) the Chief of the Army's use of a quotation on forgiveness from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in a letter to the son of a "dirty war" political prisoner who declined to participate in a series of conferences sponsored by the military. Among the positive moves to promote pluralism noted by the Center were: a seminar on religious freedom at the Catholic University in Cordoba and a "Day of Living Together and Nondiscrimination" sponsored by the Municipality of Cordoba; and the campaign to help impoverished children by a local newspaper, an NGO named Red Solidaria, and various religious groups (including the Catholic charity Caritas, the Israelite Congregation, the Anglican Church, and the Islamic Center). The full study on anti-Semitism can be requested by contacting DAIA at www.daia.org.ar/indexesp.htm.

In July 2002, vandals damaged 150 tombs in an Islamic cemetery in General Venegas in the Buenos Aires suburb of La Matanza. The crime remains unresolved but according to a representative of FEARAB, provincial officials have made good faith efforts to work with the community on the case.

The Government made no known progress in the cases of: the January 2002 desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the Buenos Aires suburb of Berazategui; the investigation into the April 2001 letter bomb received by Alberto Merenson the June 2000 vandalism of religious statues in a Catholic church in Buenos Aires; the September 2000 vandalism of a Jewish cemetery in Chaco Province; and the 1999 vandalism at Jewish cemeteries in La Tablada and Liniers, both in Buenos Aires province. Additionally, the Government made no further developments in the following anti-Semitic incidents: threats against the Jewish country club in San Miguel in February 2000; threats against two Jewish families in Parana, Entre Rios in 1999; the incident in which unknown persons shot at a Jewish school in La Floresta in 1999; and bomb threats made to the new AMIA building and the theater in Tucuman in 1999.

The investigation into the January 2001 bomb attack against the Shiite Islamic Mosque in Buenos Aires continued. However, the Government has made no notable progress.

The Court has still not scheduled a trial for the third suspect in the 1995 assault of a man they believed to be Jewish by three Buenos Aires youths.

The Government has reported no further progress in the investigation of the 1992 terrorist bombing of the Israeli Embassy. The investigation into the 1994 bombing of the AMIA cultural center continues and has resulted in the issuance of international arrest warrants for four Iranian officials and one Lebanese national associated with Hezbollah (see Section 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 organizations and NGOs that address questions of religious freedom.

The Embassy continued to provide support for the investigation into the 1994 AMIA bombing. For example, U.S. government personnel testified at the trial regarding the findings of the technical analysis of elements from the crime scene and the legal attache continues to respond to investigative leads in the AMIA case from the federal court charged with the terrorism inquiry.

The U.S. Embassy assists on an ongoing basis with the Government's implementation of a Holocaust Education Project, conducted under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force. For example, in June the Embassy again funded air transportation for two teacher trainees to attend Holocaust Education courses in the United States.

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. More than 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 also are 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 strives to protect 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.

Churches and other religious congregations do not face any special registration requirements, although they must incorporate legally 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.

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.

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 free 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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among different religious communities are amicable, and society generally is tolerant with respect to religious matters. 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.

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 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 166 square miles, and its population is approximately 276,607. Christianity is the dominant religion, of which members of the Anglican faith constitute the majority. A significant number of worshipers adhere to the Pentecostal, Methodist Moravian, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptist, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) congregations. Other minority religions include Rastafarianism, the Baha'i faith, Judaism, and Islam. Several denominations sponsor missionary activities.

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 strives to protect 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. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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. With over 125 different denominations, the country has a history of being open and tolerant of diverse forms of worship. 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.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government 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.

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 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 nu-

merous 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. Approximately 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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion; however, the preamble to the Constitution states that “the nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God.” In January 2002, an amendment to the Constitution expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, 1 of whom is to be appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches. The membership of these organizations includes several Christian denominations, including Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, and others. In March 2002, a Catholic priest was sworn into the Senate.

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. Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal and rarely occurs.

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 or 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 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 education. Roman Catholic holy days are routinely observed as school holidays. However, the Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a child to receive religious instruction or to attend any religious ceremony or observance without the child's 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. The country's 850-member Defense Force supports 1 Catholic chaplain, but does not restrict the practice of other religions.

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 free 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 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. The Government also occasionally seeks input from a cross-section of the religious community in addressing these issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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 8.27 million.

According to a November 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, the majority of the population, 78 percent, expresses affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church (a decrease of 2 percent over the last 10 years). Protestant denominations account for between 16 and 19 percent of the population. Catholic affiliation is higher in urban than in rural areas, while Protestant affiliation is highest (around 20 percent) in the countryside. Approximately 2.5 percent of the population indicated no religious affiliation. Less than .2 percent expressed affiliation to other faiths including Islam, Baha'i, Judaism, and Buddhism. There are 280 non-Catholic faith-based organizations and over 200 Catholic organizations registered in the country.

According to the 2001 National Census figures, 62 percent of the population identified themselves as indigenous. Of this total, almost 31 percent identified themselves as Quechua (2.5 million), 25 percent as Aymara (2.1 million), 2 percent Chiquitano (180,000), 1.5 percent Guarani (130,000), and another 2.3 percent as from other indigenous 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.

Missionary groups include Mennonites, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and many evangelical groups.

There is a Mormon temple/center in Cochabamba serving over 100,000 Mormons in the country. 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. 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. There are also at least three small, ad hoc mosques functioning in La Paz, and a stand-alone mosque facility is under construction in Sucre.

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 strives to protect 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), in part to compensate the Church for properties expropriated by governments in the past. The Catholic Church exercises a limited degree of political influence through the Bolivian Bishops' Conference.

In July 2000, then-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, replacing 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. The 2000 decree requires groups to consult civil authorities to address concerns such as traffic before conducting public gatherings such as outdoor celebrations. 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 may not deny legal recognition to 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. During the reporting period, the Government did not reject any completed applications. It did eliminate approximately fifty organizations from its rolls based on a determination that the organizations were no longer active, or had vacated their registered facilities without providing a new address to the Government.

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 (NGOs) and to have tax-free status. Fourteen religious groups, including the Catholic Church, have such framework agreements with the Government.

Only Catholic religious instruction is provided in public schools. By law it is optional, and is described as such in curricular materials; however, students face strong peer pressure to participate. Non-Catholic instruction is not yet available in public schools for students of other faiths; the Government continues to develop an alternate course on "ethics." 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 1980s, on the grounds of what the Government describes as nonfaith related activities of the group. Individuals listed as Hari Krishna leaders in the 1980s continue to operate a legally registered educational organization.

The Government does not take a particularly active role to promote interfaith understanding, although it is represented at interfaith meetings. The Government works with both Catholic and Protestant religious organizations on social and health programs. If the President attends Mass as part of his official function, it is traditional for all Cabinet members, regardless of their faiths, to accompany him.

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 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, and ecumenical dialog between them continues. In 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." In 1999 Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious leaders initiated an interfaith dialog in the country. As a demonstration of improving Catholic-Protestant relations, a nationwide meeting of Catholics and Protestants was held in May 2000. Catholic-Protestant meetings at the departmental (state) and national level have continued; there was a national meeting in May 2002. In addition, the churches are encouraging interfaith dialog at the grass-roots level between their members.

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. A major candidate for the presidency in June 2002 was victimized in what was clearly intended as a smear campaign linking him to the Unification Church. The candidate made a public affirmation of his Catholic faith in response.

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.

BRAZIL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects the 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 land area of 3,281,865 square miles, and its population is approximately 170 million (based on 2000 census results).

Nearly all major religions and religious organizations are present in the country. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. Information obtained from the 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage of that number regularly attend Mass. Approximately 15 percent of the population identify themselves as Protestants, an estimated 85 percent of which are Pentecostal/evangelical. Evangelical churches have grown rapidly and have challenged the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church. 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. Approximately 427,000 respondents to the census stated that they were members of what the census described as "oriental religions," including Buddhism, Thevarada Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Soka Ga kai,

other schools of Buddhism, Messianism, Seicho No-le, Perfect Liberty, Hare Krishna, Oshoo Disciples, Tenrykyo, Mahicari, the Baha'i Faith, Shintoism, and Taoism. Approximately 2.1 million respondents to the 2000 census checked "other," which includes Islam, Hinduism, spiritualism, esoteric traditions, and indigenous traditions. Approximately 7 percent of the population indicated that they did not practice any religion. Approximately 12 million participants did not respond.

Followers of African and syncretistic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constitute approximately 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.

There are approximately 500,000 Muslims. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Arab countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who have arrived in the country during the past 25 years. There are approximately 55 mosques and Muslim religious centers. Shintoism is maintained to a limited degree among the Japanese-Brazilian community. Approximately 100,000 citizens identify themselves as Jewish. There are approximately 45,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and approximately 29,000 in Sao Paulo. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

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 strives to protect 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 indigenous lands. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government restricts the access of missionary groups to indigenous people 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 free practice of religion. However, in April, legal representatives of Umbanda and Candomble spiritist groups pressed a lawsuit against two Christian evangelicals for violating the "hate crime" law by distributing evangelistic tracts that allegedly disparaged Iemanja, an African deity, and for proselytizing spiritists at their annual festival in Praia Grande. At a hearing on April 16, the judge found the accused guilty of charges and fined them \$300 (1,000 reais) and warned them that if they did not stop proselytizing spiritists at the festival, they could face stiffer consequences in the future. The defendants filed a petition to have the decision annulled, claiming precedent-setting implications for religious freedom should Christians be barred from sharing their faith with interested bystanders in a public place. The case was still pending appeal at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 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. The National Commission for Religious Dialogue brings together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

Anti-Semitism is rare; however, there are signs of increasing tension between Jews and Muslims. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet web sites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There have been no reports of violent incidents directed at Jews.

In February, a bishop of Vetro Catholic Church, the dissident branch of the Roman Catholic Church, was shot five times in the chest and killed in the church's headquarters in Sao Paulo. The gunman reportedly visited the church to ask the bishop to preside over a wedding, then shot him and fled the scene. The Vetro Catholic Church is part of a movement begun in the 19th century by clergy and other faithful who refused to accept the infallibility of the pope. The case was still under investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

CANADA

The 1982 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 31 million. While there is no state or dominant religion, an estimated 74.6 percent of the population belongs to Christian denominations or claims Christianity as their religion. Roman Catholics (43 percent of the population) constitute the largest single religious denomination, followed by Protestant denominations (29 percent). United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal are the largest Protestant denominations in Canada. Approximately 1.1 percent of the population is Jewish. According to a recent government census, the percentage of the population who are members of the Muslim faith has increased to 2 percent of the population, which is double the amount recorded in the last census 10 years ago. Other religious groups include Buddhists (approximately 1 percent of the population); Hindus (1 percent); and Sikhs (1 percent). The number of persons professing other religions, such as Scientology, Baha'i, Shinto, Taoism, aboriginal spirituality, and pagan religions, constitutes 0.2 percent of the population. The census also reflected that the percentage claiming no religious affiliation is 16 percent of the total population, an increase from 12 percent in the last census.

A 2002 poll on religious attitudes by the Pew Research Center indicated that approximately 21 percent of the population attend church on a weekly basis, and 30 percent said that religion is very important to them.

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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious groups are not required 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 recent years, the Quebec provincial government took steps to abolish Catholic and Protestant status for public schools; public schools in Quebec are no longer faith-based and are open to all. The Ontario provincial government, which previously had allowed tax credits only for tuition paid to Roman Catholic private schools, began allowing tax credits for tuition paid to all private schools, provided such schools satisfy certain educational standards.

The Government has designated some religious holidays as national holidays, specifically, Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Monday. These holidays do not negatively impact any religious groups.

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 free practice of religion. In April, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear cases brought by groups in Quebec who claim that their right to freedom of religion has been restricted unduly by condominium contracts and municipal bylaws. In one case, a condominium association in Montreal barred a group of Orthodox Jewish families from constructing temporary huts on their balconies to celebrate the fall festival of Sukkot. In the second case, a local municipality refused to rezone land upon which a group of Jehovah's Witnesses wished to build a church hall because the land would then be exempt from property taxes. Decisions in these cases are expected sometime in 2003.

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 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. However, tension continued between the Jewish and Islamic communities in Canada. The number of anti-Semitic incidents increased during the reporting period, and there have been expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment as well.

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 459 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2002, an increase of 173 incidents from 2001. Incidents included general harassment of Jews (282 or 62 percent of the reported incidents), vandalism of property (148 or 32 percent), and violence (29 or 6 percent). On September 9, 2002, pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Montreal assaulted a number of Jews during a riot on the campus of Concordia University where former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to give a speech. Additionally, authorities accused a young skinhead of the July 2002 murder of an orthodox Jew in Toronto.

Expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment continued during the reporting period, according to the Canadian chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN). In a survey released in September 2002, 60 percent of Canadian Muslims said they had experienced bias or discrimination after September 2001. The threat of war in Iraq evoked some anti-Muslim sentiments; however, it also resulted in some expressions of compassion and support toward Muslims. Muslims experienced verbal abuse, religious or ethnic profiling, and discrimination in the workplace. According to CAIR-CAN, some Muslims believe the Government has been indifferent to anti-Muslim attitudes and discrimination.

In November 2002, the vandalism of a Raelian information center in Quebec, known as "UFO Land," resulted in more than \$60,000 (81,942.47 CAD) in damages. The Raelian Church of Canada, an officially recognized religion in Quebec, had targeted Quebec high schools as part of its ongoing campaign to persuade Roman Catholics to renounce their faith.

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.

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 during the period covered by this report. A 2000 law gives other religious entities the same legal status as that enjoyed by the Catholic Church; however, the Catholic Church unofficially still retains a 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 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 according to the 2002 census is just over 15 million. According to the same census, 70 percent of the population over the age 14 were identified as Roman Catholic (down from 76.8 percent in 1992).

The term Evangelical in the country 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 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. In 2002, Evangelicals totaled 1,699,725 persons, or 15.1 percent of the population over the age of 14 (up from 12.4 percent in 1992).

Other faiths recorded in the 2002 census are Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), those identifying themselves as Jewish (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). All other religions totaled 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent. In the 2002 census, atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constituted approximately 8.3 percent (931,990) of the population over the age of 14 (up from 5.8 percent in 1992).

A wide variety of active faiths exist in the country. In addition to the predominant Catholic Church and the large 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 represented. 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 are located in Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in 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. The March 2000 law on religion ("ley de culto") includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination. However, the Catholic Church continues to enjoy a privileged status among religions and occasionally receives preferential treatment. In addition to Catholic events, government officials attend major Protestant and Jewish religious and other ceremonies.

Before the adoption of the 2000 law, 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. Approximately 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 allegations of widespread criminal misconduct.

The 2000 law on religion allows any religion to obtain the legal public right status. Under the law, the Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registry petition although it may 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. Instead the semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State (CDE), the official entity charged with defense of the State's legal interests, must initiate a judicial review.

In addition, the 2000 law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. Religious entities may set up affiliates (schools, clubs, and 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.

As of mid-year, 425 religious faiths and related organizations had registered with the Ministry of Justice under the new law. Many religious entities continue to delay registering due to the complexities involved in formulating a new charter and bylaws. Many others have hesitated due to the taxes and fees involved in transferring the property from the old legal entity to the new one. The Ministry of Justice formed a committee that includes representatives from affected organizations to seek a mechanism to avoid payment of the taxes and fees for the initial re-registration.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, three Roman Catholic holidays are considered national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 2000 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 can still be subject to the arbitrary decisions of local administrators. In January, the Ministry of Justice issued regulations for Chile's prison system and the Ministry of Health is drafting regulations for hospitals. Non-Catholic pastors report that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the reporting period; however, they would like each faith to have an official chaplain designated to represent them as does the Roman Catholic Chaplain for prisons and hospitals.

The celebration of a Roman Catholic Mass frequently marks public events and if the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. The military continues to block efforts by non-Catholic faiths to provide military chaplains. According to one report, in 2002 the base commander forbade members of the military living on the air force base in the northern city of Iquique from conducting Bible study for children in their homes. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Roman Catholic Church generally is considered beneficial to one's military career and in the navy it is said to be almost a requirement. However, in 2001 an ecumenical chapel was opened in the Investigative Police Academy and an Evangelical chaplain was appointed. Two ethics instructors at the academy are Evangelical. In December 2001, for the first time, the President appointed an Evangelical chaplain to the chapel located in the Presidential Palace La Moneda.

Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Roman Catholic. Schools are required to offer religious education, on an optional basis, twice a week through middle school. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax. As local school administrations decide how funds are spent for religious instruction, instruction is predominantly in the Roman Catholic faith. In 2001, the Education and Gospel Task Force in San Pedro de la Paz had to secure a court order to permit an Evangelical teacher to teach religion at the public school. Church leaders also report continued resistance by local school administrators to appointing evangelical religion teachers, based on other than economic considerations, in the Santiago suburbs of Quinta Normal and Puente Alto. There reportedly are instances in which local officials refuse to allow an evangelical religious instructor to teach without prior certification from a Roman Catholic priest.

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 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.

Ecumenical groups exist, although they often form on an ad hoc basis depending on the issue involved. All major faiths participated in a human rights "dialog table" led by the Defense Minister, which submitted a report to the Government in January 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.

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 is no state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Paramilitaries occasionally targeted representatives and members of religious organizations. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) regularly targeted religious leaders and practitioners, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression. Illegal armed groups generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political, rather than religious, reasons; guerrillas committed the vast majority of these abuses.

Relations between the various faiths generally are 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 439,736 square miles, and its estimated population is 44 million. Although the Government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, a 2001 poll commissioned by the country's leading newspaper, *El Tiempo*, indicated that the country's population is 81 percent Roman Catholic. Of the remaining respondents, 10 percent identified themselves as "Christians" and 3.5 percent as "evangelicals." Another 1.9 percent professed no religious beliefs. According to data provided by their respective national headquarters, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) have 180,000, 130,000, and 110,000 members, respectively, totaling approximately 1 percent of the population. Other religious faiths and movements with a significant number of adherents in Colombia include Judaism, Islam, animism, and various syncretistic belief systems. An estimated 60 percent of respondents to the *El Tiempo* poll reported that they do not practice their faith actively.

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 residing in the western department of Choco. Jews are concentrated in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions in remote, rural areas.

Jewish leaders estimate that as many as one-third of the country's small Jewish community fled the country by the end of 2000. The principal causes of emigration included concerns about the growing numbers of murders, assaults, and kidnappings of Jewish business leaders, as well as economic problems caused by the country's recession.

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 specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The law states that there is no official 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, which was the country's official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are now unenforceable because of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 Constitutional Court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.

The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: recognition of the church as a legal entity (*personeria juridica*) and special public recognition. The Ministry of Interior readily grants the former recognition; its only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and elementary organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious faith that wishes to establish a presence in the country must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The Ministry of Interior may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights. Since 1995, the Ministry of Interior has approved 767 of the approximately 2000 applications received from churches; approximately 90 percent of the approvals were for evangelical churches.

Accession to a 1997 public law agreement between the State and non-Roman Catholic religions is required for such organizations to minister to their adherents through public institutions such as hospitals or prisons or to perform marriages recognized by the State. When deciding whether to grant accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government considers a religion's total membership, its degree of popular acceptance within society, and other relevant factors, such as the content of the organization's statutes and its required behavioral norms. As of the end of the period covered by this report, 12 non-Roman Catholic Christian churches had received this special status. No non-Christian religion is a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement. Many churches that are signatories to the agreement report that some local authorities have failed to comply with the accord. The Ministry of Interior has stated that it corrects local authorities when complaints of noncompliance are received. More than 40 churches have requested a new public law agreement that would have less exacting standards for recognition than the 1997 agreement. The Ministry of Interior did not move forward with a new agreement during the period covered by this report. Some prominent non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jewish community, have not requested special religious recognition.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations issues visas to foreign missionaries and religious administrators of denominations that have received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa that is valid for a maximum of 2 years. Applicants must have a certificate issued by the Ministry of Interior confirming that the religion is registered with the Ministry, a certificate issued by the religious institution itself confirming the applicant's membership 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 recognizes parents' right to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious instruction. It also states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools. However, the Roman Catholic Church and religious groups that have acceded to the 1997 public law agreement may provide religious instruction in public schools to students who wish to receive it. Religions without special recognition may establish 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 in rural areas that have no state-run schools. These schools are also tax exempt.

In April 2001, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary (CSJ) ruled that the Colombian Institute of Higher Education, which administers the country's college entrance examination, must provide alternate examination dates for evangelicals whose beliefs preclude them from taking examinations on Sunday. In May 2002, the Con-

stitutional Court ruled that university instructors may not force students to reveal their religious beliefs or require them to take courses that might obligate them to do so.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the 1991 Constitution mandated the separation of church and state, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status. Participation in the 1997 agreement is required for non-Catholic groups 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 and the lack of Protestant chaplains in the armed forces, hospitals, and prisons. However, the Ministry of Interior states that it corrects local authorities when it receives such complaints.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes. Local governments also may exempt 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 exempt non-Catholic churches from taxes.

City planning restricts the number of churches in residential areas. Due to its historical presence, the Catholic Church frequently has churches many centuries old and predating zoning requirements in the best locations. Protestant denominations are often forced to locate their churches in commercial and industrial zones.

Due to threats from paramilitaries or, more frequently, guerrillas, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church also reported that paramilitaries and guerrillas issued death threats against rural priests who spoke out against them.

The FARC placed religious restrictions on persons living in its safe haven, or "despeje," that was granted by the Government in 1998 to facilitate peace negotiations. The despeje was abolished when peace talks broke off in February 2002. During the period covered by this report, the FARC continued to compel Roman Catholic and evangelical churches to pay "war taxes" levied in the former despeje and other regions under effective FARC control.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Illegal armed groups generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political, rather than religious, reasons. Paramilitaries occasionally targeted representatives and members of religious organizations. Guerrilla groups were responsible for the vast majority of such attacks and threats; the FARC and ELN regularly targeted religious leaders and practitioners, killing, kidnaping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression. The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office reported that it is investigating the political murder of 31 assassinated members of the clergy believed to be killed because they were outspoken members of the Church.

The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church reported that illegal armed groups killed 25 Catholic priests (including a bishop and an archbishop) between 1987 and mid-2002. Guerrilla attacks against Catholic Church leaders increased during the reporting period. In 2002, authorities recorded the violent deaths of 11 priests, one nun, and Cali Archbishop Monsignor Isaias Duarte Cancino. Nearly all of the killings were attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. According to the Colombian Evangelical Council, 133 evangelical ministers have been killed in the past 10 years, the majority since 2000. During the year, Colombian NGO Justapaz reported that 28 evangelical church leaders had been assassinated. Most of the latest killings occurred in the southwestern department of Cauca, a largely rural department dominated by the FARC. The FARC is believed to be responsible for 90 percent of the murders of Protestant pastors.

In May 2002, FARC forces engaged in combat with paramilitaries inaccurately fired gas cylinder bombs at the town of Bojaya, Choco department. One of the projectiles struck the town's main church, killing 119 civilians who had gathered inside

for protection. There is no evidence that the church was targeted intentionally or that the assault was religiously motivated.

In response to the increased risks faced by church members, 757 local security fronts made up of people who live close to churches have been organized to protect Roman Catholic priests and officials. The Colombian National Police designed the program following the assassination of Monsignor Isaias Duarte Cancino in March 2002. This protection plan has not been extended to include other faiths.

Unknown perpetrators killed a number of religious leaders.

For example, on May 8, unidentified assailants wearing camouflage uniforms identified and then murdered four members of a Protestant church in Tierralta, Cordoba Department. The victims included evangelical pastor Miguel Enrique Posada Vertel, church treasurer Ana Berenice Giraldo Vasquez, an 80-year-old woman, and a teenage boy.

On August 5, 2002, FARC guerrillas in San Vicente de Caguen, Caqueta Department, killed United Pentecostal Church pastor Abel Ruiz. The United Pentecostal Church reports that more than 70 pastors have been killed over the past 3 years and more than 300 churches have been closed due to guerrilla attacks.

On September 20, 2002, paramilitary forces outside a chapel in Medellin, Antioquia Department, killed Father Jose Luis Arroyave. The priest had been an activist in the conflictive Comuna 13 community.

On September 25, 2002, the Colombian Army killed FARC 54th Front Commander Jesus Vargas, in a clash in Meta Department. Vargas stood accused of murdering a priest in 1998.

On September 28, 2002, Parish Priest Jorge Sanchez Ramirez was murdered by unknown assailants along a road in Palmira, Valle del Cauca Department. Sanchez had been an outspoken critic of Colombia's violence.

On October 17, 2002, several unidentified armed men killed Jose Luis Cardenas, parish priest in his hometown of Chalan, Sucre Department. A day later, the body of Gabriel Arias Posada of the Dioceses of Armenai, Caldas Department was discovered. Arias had been on a humanitarian mission, negotiating the release of former Quindio Senator Ancizar Lopez, who was kidnaped by the FARC.

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of kidnappings, primarily by guerrilla groups.

In February, the FARC released Seventh-day Adventist minister Gonzalo Cardona after 5 months in captivity in Antioquia Department.

On October 8, 2002, the FARC kidnaped a 76-year-old evangelical minister in Sucre Department. The guerrillas held him for 12 days while demanding a large ransom, but later released him when they discovered the pastor was not wealthy.

On November 11, 2002, guerrillas from the FARC kidnaped Zipaquira bishop and president of the Latin American Bishops Council, Jorge Enrique Jimenez Carvajal, and parish priest Desiderio Orjuela while traveling to a religious ceremony in Pacho, Cudinamarca Department. On November 15, the Colombian Army and the Prosecutor General's Office rescued the two men and arrested John Leider Desiderio Chaparro, the guerrilla implicated in the double kidnaping.

In 2002, the Human Rights Office of the Vice Presidency registered six kidnappings of Catholic Church clergy, while Justapaz reported three kidnappings of evangelical ministers during the period covered by this report.

The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church reported that 57 Catholic churches in 8 different departments have been seriously damaged or destroyed in the last decade, including 9 churches in the past 2 years. Roman Catholic churches generally are not attacked intentionally, but often are affected by guerrilla attacks on police stations and mayors' offices located near churches.

According to the MUC, as of August 2002, the FARC had forced the closures of more than 450 evangelical churches in the departments of Meta, Guajira, Tolima, Vaupes, Guainia, Guaviare, Vichada, Casanare, and Arauca. The FARC also extorted or forced the closure of rural evangelical schools. The MUC reported an overall increase in the number of kidnappings and extortions. Guerrillas continued to attack rural evangelical Christians and their churches, in the belief that the churches were fronts for U.S. Government activities. Justapaz reported that 43 evangelical churches closed due to guerrilla and paramilitary violence during the year. Mormon church leaders and facilities remained under threat for the same reason.

Guerrillas or paramilitaries harass some indigenous groups that practice animistic or syncretistic religions. However, such harassment generally appears motivated by political or economic differences (whether real or perceived) or by questions of land ownership, rather than by religious concerns.

A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous rural region of Santander department. Through its website, the community has asserted that it is harassed by government security forces. Government officials claim to have received reports that

the commune holds residents there against their will. The number of residents of the commune is unknown, although it is accepted widely that many are foreigners. The community's insularity and isolation in a region with a significant guerrilla presence makes it difficult to gather accurate information.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

A number of faith-based nongovernmental organizations promote human rights, social and economic development, and a negotiated settlement to the country's armed conflict. The most influential of these organizations either are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church or were founded by Church officials. The Church continues to be the only institutional presence in many rural areas, and conducts important social work through its Social Pastoral Agency.

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 context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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 has a total area of 19,652 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion, 72 percent of the population is Catholic, with 40 percent of that figure actively practicing Catholicism. A November 2001 Demoscopia, Inc. poll found that an estimated 19 percent belong to other Christian, non-Catholic churches. Approximately 1 percent of the population practiced non-Christian faiths and 10 percent practiced no religion at all. The non-Catholic Christian population is divided among the mainstream Protestant denominations, such as the Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopalian churches, and also among the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists. 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 operate a university, attracting students from throughout the Caribbean basin. Non-Christian religions, including Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Hare Krishna, Scientology, 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. In the event of a violation of religious freedom, the victim's remedy is to file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, which may order the defendant to pay a fine, serve jail time, or compensate the plaintiff for such discrimination.

There is no general tax exoneration for the Catholic Church or any other church; there is an exoneration only for real estate that is used directly for worship by any religious organization. The blanket exoneration previously enjoyed by the Catholic Church was amended in 1992. The law 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. 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 organizations. However, churches must incorporate to have legal standing, like any other organization, and must have a minimum of twelve members.

Various traditionally Catholic religious holidays are considered national holidays. However, if an individual wishes to observe another religious holiday, the Labor Code provides the necessary flexibility for that observance, upon the employer's approval.

Although not mandatory, Catholic religious instruction is provided in the public schools. Students may obtain exemptions from this instruction with the permission of their parents. The school director, the student's parents, and the student's teacher must agree on an alternative course of instruction for the exempted student during the time of the Catholic instruction. The exempted student is encouraged to remain on school grounds during this time. 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 choose.

Only officials of the Catholic Church can officiate marriages that are automatically recognized by the state. In addition, the government traditionally affords the Catholic Church an opportunity to participate in social, economic and political events. The Catholic Church has been actively involved in negotiations to end two recently concluded labor strikes, one by public school teachers and one by electrical/telecom (ICE) workers. The Archbishop of San Jose served as a witness to an earlier agreement between the Government and the ICE unions, which was concluded in February. The Archbishop also recently signed a manifesto against child labor during a ceremony that was attended by President Abel Pacheco and leading members of the media.

The Government does not restrict the establishment of churches. All applications for the establishment of places of worship are submitted to the local municipality, and must comply with safety and noise regulations. 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. Some churches reportedly have been closed by municipalities, health departments, or police as a result of such conflicts. In contrast, established Catholic Churches often were 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 in politics of any clergy or layman motivated by religion.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedoms

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

Catholic instruction is provided in all public schools. Parents have the option of sending their children to private schools, which may offer alternative religious instruction. Parents do not have the option of home schooling their children.

The majority of state-run hospitals in the country have Catholic priests on staff who console sick and dying patients. However, Protestants and other non-Catholics have voiced concern that their clergy must follow routine administrative procedures for the general public to gain entrance into most hospitals. These routine administrative procedures can be strict and cumbersome. Some Protestant ministers have administrative agreements with hospitals that permit their uninhibited entrance; however, the hospital director may revoke these agreements at any time. At the end of the period covered by this report, a Protestant minister in the Legislative Assembly who represents the Renovation Party was seeking passage of a bill that would sanction in law the rights of non-Catholic clergy to enter and work in hospitals to console sick and dying patients. The law also would provide a legal framework for the establishment and operation of non-Catholic churches, including the accreditation of their officials.

While the required oath for government service includes the phrase "before God and country," an alternate oath is available to those who choose to use it.

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 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 the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials have met with the Archbishop of San Jose to discuss economic, social and labor issues. The Embassy also has contact with the Protestant minister who holds a seat in the Legislative Assembly and has an interest in children's issues. Finally, the Embassy coordinates with the Ministry of Foreign Relations' Director of Religion regarding multilateral efforts to ban all forms of human cloning.

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; however, overall human rights conditions deteriorated sharply as indicated by the Government's arrest, summary trial, and jailing of 75 human rights activists and independent journalists in March and April, the biggest such crackdown in more than two decades. 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 worshipping 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.

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 continued to increase due to the establishment of house churches, which some churches believed was fractious.

The U.S. Government has raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the 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 continues to maintain regular contact with various religious leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 42,803 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 were 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 Santería. Some sources estimate that as much as 70 percent of the population practice Santería 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, particularly the Assemblies of God. Twenty-two denominations, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists, are members of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC). Most CCC members are officially recognized by the State, though several, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, are not registered and are recognized only through their membership in the CCC. Another 31 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 the country has been a largely secular society without an especially strong religious character. Catholic Church officials usually estimate that approximately 10 percent of baptized Catholics attend 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 approximately 30,000 persons. Prior to 2001, church attendance had grown in some denominations, and increased substantially at Catholic Church services following the Pope's visit in 1998. However, both Catholic and Protestant leaders believe that church attendance peaked during 1999 and early 2000.

There are approximately 320 Catholic priests, 40 permanent 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 those 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 Justice to obtain official recognition. Registration procedures require groups to identify where they will carry out their activities, demonstrate that they have the funding to carry out their activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. 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 and a small congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

However, in practice the Government appears to have halted registration of new denominations.

Registration facilitates the ability of church officials to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, entitles them to receive religious literature through the CCC, and allows them to meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extra-official means, and risk the closure of their technically illegal meeting places.

Along with recognized churches, the Roman Catholic humanitarian organization Caritas, the Masons, 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. For example, in April the Government revealed that an agent of the Ministry of the Interior had contributed material to a Catholic publication under the guise of being a dissident.

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. Members of 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 continued to be sporadic reports of harassment by local Communist Party and government officials. The Government has authorized small assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses and one large gathering of as many as 7,000 persons, the opening of a central office in Havana, and publication of the group's magazine and other religious tracts; these activities continued during the period covered by this report.

Religious literature and materials must be imported through a registered religious group and can only be distributed to officially recognized religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations. The CCC reports that it has distributed 1.5 million Bibles since 1998. Bibles are distributed among denominations according to the number of members of each church.

Several Catholic diocese and lay groups publish magazines, including "Palabra Nueva" (New Word) of the Archdiocese of Havana and "Vital" (Stained Glass Window) of the Diocese of Pinar del Rio. The publications are not registered with the Ministry of Culture, as required by law. The Government has not blocked printing or distribution of Catholic magazines; however, the State impedes access to printing equipment and has accused the editor of one magazine of subversive behavior for writing about sensitive political and social issues.

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

The Government allowed 9 foreign priests and 12 foreign nuns into the country to replace priests and nuns whose visas had expired; however, the applications of 60 priests and 130 nuns remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Government led to strong confrontations with institutional churches in the early 1960s. During that period, many church leaders and religious professionals left the country, fearing persecution. More than 130 Catholic religious workers, including priests, were expelled, and a few served long prison terms. From 1965–67 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 (such as teaching). Although the Government abandoned its official atheism in the early 1990s, most churches had been weakened seriously, and active participation in religious services fell 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.

In February 2003, the Archbishop of Havana issued a pastoral letter lamenting the disintegration of Cuban families and the extreme pressure to emigrate, and called upon the Government to shift from “policies of vengeance” to “policies of compassion.” In March 2003, the Government invited a new Catholic order to establish a presence in Cuba without first coordinating with the Cuban Catholic Church; however, the Government failed to take any action on previous requests from the Cuban Catholic Church on behalf of 15 other orders. Many observers viewed the Government’s invitation as retaliation for the Archbishop’s critical statements in February.

In March 2003, the Cuban Ambassador to the Vatican asserted in an article in the Italian magazine “30 Giorni” that complete religious freedom existed in Cuba and urged the Cuban Catholic Church to register its publications with the Ministry of Culture. The Cuban Conference of Catholic Bishops responded by sending an open letter to the editor of “30 Giorni” criticizing the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party for exerting strict control over the activities of the Catholic Church, especially State restrictions on religious education and Church access to the mass media. The Bishops’ letter noted that the Catholic Church had declined to register its publications because registration would force it to concede control to the State regarding the subject matter, number of pages, frequency, and number of copies of Catholic Church publications.

The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely has authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. Most registered religious groups are granted permission to hold services in private homes. Religious groups must obtain a permit to reconstruct and repair existing places of worship. The process of obtaining a permit and purchasing construction materials from government outlets is lengthy and expensive. In October 2002, the Government authorized the Greek Orthodox Church to build a church in Havana.

In March 2001, the Italian news agency ANSA reported that provincial leaders of the Communist Party requested the authorities 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, which threatened the continued rule of the Communist Party, through such activities. Following the publication of the article, Communist Party leaders in Havana reportedly apologized to the Catholic Church hierarchy.

Following April 2000 complaints by the Pentecostals regarding unauthorized foreign missionaries (see Section III), the CCC has continued to request that overseas member church organizations assist them in controlling foreign missionaries and prohibiting them from establishing unauthorized Pentecostal churches.

Religious officials are allowed to visit prisoners; however, prison officials sometimes refuse visits to certain political prisoners. In July 2002, prison officials denied religious visits to Enrique Garcia Morejon of the Christian Liberation Movement. For a religious visit to take place, the prisoner must submit a written request, and the prison director must grant approval. In punishment cells, prisoners were denied access to reading materials, including Bibles.

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. Additionally, the Government denies access to the Internet to some religious groups, including the Catholic Church.

Members of the armed forces do not attend religious services in their uniform, probably to avoid possible reprimand by superiors.

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 have been permitted to 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 au-

thorities. 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. In September 2002, local government authorities, for the fifth consecutive year, allowed the Catholic Church to hold an outdoor procession to mark the feast day of Our Lady of Charity in Havana. Prior to the event, security police ordered a number of human rights activists in Santiago not to attend the procession. On September 8, thousands of persons attended the various Masses held throughout the day in honor of Our Lady of Charity, the patron saint of the imprisoned. There were smaller, local processions throughout the provinces during the period covered by this report.

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 continued sporadic reports that local Communist Party and government officials harassed members of Jehovah's Witnesses; however, church officials reported that the number of such incidents decreased.

State security officials visited some priests and pastors prior to significant religious events, ostensibly to warn them that dissidents are trying to "use the Church"; however, some critics claimed that these visits were conducted in an effort to foster mistrust between the churches and human rights or pro-democracy activists. In May and June, State security agents warned the wives of several political prisoners that they would be arrested if they joined other wives of political prisoners for Mass at Havana's Santa Rita Catholic Church. Some of the wives continued to attend Mass together on a weekly basis, but said they feared Government retaliation against them or against their jailed husbands.

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 laypersons.

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." In April 2003, the Government described the same Catholic Church magazine as "subversive literature" during the summary trials of 75 political prisoners arrested in March.

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 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 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. Fidel 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 continued to increase 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 the 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 CCC and the Government generally have a mutually supportive relationship.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. Government policy toward Cuba is to promote a rapid, peaceful transition to democracy 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 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 Government to cease its repressive practices.

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 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 289 square miles, and its population is approximately 70,158. Christianity is the dominant religion, of which the Roman Catholic faith constitutes a substantial plurality. Over the last several years, there have been changes in the religious demographics of the country, with a substantial number of individuals joining Pentecostal churches. There are also Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican, Methodist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptist, Nazarian, Church of Christ, and Brethern Christian communities. The minority religions include Rastafarianism, the Baha'i Faith, and Islam.

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 strives to protect 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. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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 peace, greater mutual understanding, and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government 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.

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, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contribute to the free practice of religion.

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, two-thirds of the island of Hispanola, covers an area of approximately 16,435 sq. miles. As of July 2000, the population was listed at 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. Many Catholics also practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santeria) or witchcraft (brujeria), but because this practice rarely is admitted openly the number of adherents is impossible to estimate. Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are practiced. There are synagogues in the country; however, there were no rabbis present by the end of the period covered by this report, nor were there any mosques.

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 nominally Roman Catholic and 11 percent Protestant Christian, inclusive of evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants. In the same study, 20.1 percent of the sample said 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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. However, 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.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government 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; however, no requests for tax exemption were denied during the period covered by this report.

The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reported that they have good relations with the Government. In 2000, the Mormons completed the construction of a major temple in Santo Domingo with an associated administrative and educational facility. The construction was completed without difficulty.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally does not interfere with the practice of religion. Attendance at Catholic Mass for members of the National Police is strongly encouraged, but they are allowed to practice their own beliefs. The Catholic Cardinal in the Dominican Republic is the Army Chaplain for the Armed Forces and the Police and holds the rank of Major General.

A July 2000 law required that the Bible be read in public schools. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading in their weekly activities. Although some teachers voluntarily conducted the readings, the Secretariat of Education had not ordered schools to require that all teachers comply with the law.

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 many foreign missionaries, including groups that proselytize heavily such as evangelical Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons. 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 detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL 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 by private persons.

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.

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 was estimated to be 12,200,000 in 2001, when the last census was conducted. The General Registry of Religious Entities has registered approximately 3,000 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. The overwhelming majority of the population considers itself to be at least nominally Roman Catholic. Some groups, especially indigenous people who live in the mountains, follow a brand of

Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to how indigenous deities were venerated.

Some multi-denominational Christian 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 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. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 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 by society.

The following faiths also are present in the country, but in relatively small numbers: Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, and the Church of Scientology, as well as Eastern Orthodox and other Christian denominations such as Anglican, Assembly of God, Episcopalian, Lutheran and Presbyterian. Two relatively new groups are the Native American churches of Itzachilatan, whose adherents practice indigenous healing rites and nature worship, and the followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god. Atheists also exist.

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 strives to protect 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 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered unless they engage in commercial activity. Religious organizations that do not engage in commercial activity may still choose to register to obtain a legal identity, which is useful when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must possess a charter and be in nonprofit status, include all names used by the group (to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission), and provide signatures of at least 35 members. In addition, groups must file a petition with the Ministry of Government using a licensed attorney, and pay a \$40 registration fee.

At the political level, the Government retains strong ties to the Vatican; the Papal Nuncio is the customary dean of the diplomatic corps.

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 free 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 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.

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.

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 area of 8,108 square miles, and its population is over 6 million.

The country is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to a 1998 survey by the Central American University Public Opinion Institute, approximately 55.2 percent of the population were members of the Roman Catholic Church. Additionally, 20.6 percent were members of Protestant churches, 2.1 percent were associated with other churches and religious groups, and 22.1 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 strives to protect 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 Governance. 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 (which has since merged into the Ministry of Governance) with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-Catholic churches in the country. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the DGFASL reported 108 requests for new registration. Eighty-one were approved, 26 are still pending, and 1 was denied and given the opportunity to resubmit due to insufficient documentation. There have been no allegations that churches encountered problems in obtaining registration.

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

The Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, sex, or religion.

Non-Salvadoran nationals seeking to actively promote a church or religion must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities. Visitors to the country are not allowed to proselytize in the country while 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 free practice of religion. The Human Rights Ombudswoman's Office reported no claims of discrimination or persecution on religious grounds.

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 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. The National Conference of Churches (CNI), an interfaith organization created to promote religious tolerance and to coordinate a church-sponsored social program, has been inactive for more than a year. Although discussions began in early 2002 about restarting the organization, no action had been taken by year's end.

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 NGOs.

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, has a total area of 133 square miles, and a population of approximately 98,000. The population is of African, East Indian, and European descent. Approximately 90,000 persons live on the island of Grenada, 7,000 live on Carriacou and 900 on Petit Martinique. Roman Catholics account for 64 percent of the population; Anglicans 22 percent; Methodists 3 percent, and Seventh-day Adventists 3 percent. Additional denominations include Presbyterians, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals. All the major religious denominations are represented in most towns and villages except Petit Martinique, where the population is 98 percent Roman Catholic and 2 percent Seventh-day Adventist. There are no synagogues or mosques in Grenada.

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 strives to protect 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 Christians. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, place of origin, political opinion, color, creed, or sex, and the Government generally adheres to these provisions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives discussed issues or events involving religious freedom with government officials when soliciting support for international organization resolutions regarding broader human rights concerns.

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 a total area of 41,699 square miles, and its population is approximately 12 million. While no definitive census data are available, the U.N. estimates that the country's indigenous population is 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 are Catholic and approximately 40 percent are Protestant, primarily evangelical. Leaders of Maya spiritual organizations maintain that 40 to 50 percent of the population practice 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, and 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 1999 elections. Former de facto President and retired General Efraín Ríos Montt heads the FRG and serves as President of Congress; he is 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 to "recognize, respect, and protect the distinct forms of spirituality practiced by the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinca" groups. While the previous Congress passed a law containing 50 proposed constitutional amendments, including this one, the package was defeated in a 1999 popular referendum, and no further efforts have been made to amend the Constitution. In May the U.N. Verification Mission noted in its presentation to the international donor community at the Consultative Group that the accord continued to face serious barriers to its implementation. 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 religious recognition, nor does it impose registration restrictions for religious members to worship together. However, the Government does require religious congregations as well as other non-religious associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities 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 an intention to 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 during the period covered by this report.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary visa, which is issued for a period of up to one 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 pri-

vate schools established by religious organizations. The Constitution permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. 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 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. However, in October 2001, the Government swore in the Commission for the Definition of Sacred Places to address such issues. The Commission has not taken action to protect any specific sacred sites since its inception.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

An appeal remains pending in the Constitutional Court regarding the June 2001 conviction of three military officers and an assistant priest for the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi, the Coordinator of the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights (ODHA). In October 2002, an appeals court annulled the 2001 conviction and ordered a retrial, which the ODHA immediately appealed to the Supreme Court. In February, the Supreme Court Appellate Chamber confirmed the June 2001 trial, a decision that the defense then appealed to the Constitutional Court.

There were multiple reports of assassinations of religious leaders of various denominations over the last year; however, evidence has not surfaced during the reporting period in any of the cases to suggest that the murders were related to the individuals' religious practices. In April human rights activist and Mayan priest Diego Xon Salazar was murdered in Chichicastenango, Quiche province. Xon Salazar had reportedly received multiple death threats related to his work denouncing the resurgence of the civilian defense patrols (ex-PACS) in the Quiche. The investigation of his murder was pending at the end of the reporting period. In May Mayan priest Gerardo Camo Manuel was murdered during a religious ceremony in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz province, after reportedly receiving death threats from one or more members of his community. The investigation was on-going at the end of the period covered by this report.

Also in May evangelical pastor Oscar Armando Montiel Montalvan was murdered during an evening service in his parish in San Juan Sacatepequez, Sacatepequez province. While the police continued to investigate the crime, none of his congregation had testified to the identity of the assailants, leading the police to speculate that witnesses fear retribution. Catholic priest Edgar Estuardo del Cid was kidnapped, detained, and threatened for several hours along with three parishioners in Guanagazapa, Escuintla province. In the report filed with the Public Ministry, the victims attributed the crime to del Cid's criticism of social injustice during his homilies.

In October 2002, Mayan spiritual leader Antonio Pop Caal was kidnapped and murdered in Coban, Alta Verapaz province. His alleged murderers were being held in custody and a trial was pending at the end of the reporting period. In December 2002, Mayan priest Marcos Sical Perez was killed by unknown assailants in Salama, Baja Verapaz province. An investigation was pending at the end of the reporting period.

While these crimes have not been linked to religious persecution, they represent a disturbing trend of targeting voices of religious leaders who dissent against the corruption and impunity that plague society.

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.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL 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. However, widespread intolerance of the free practice of traditional indigenous religious rituals was reported. A 2002 study by the Ecumenical Forum for Peace and Reconciliation found that in isolated lynching cases, evangelical pastors have encouraged such activities against those who practice traditional beliefs.

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 disagreements with evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, Catholics. Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of indigenous practices than the Catholic Church, whose practice in many areas of the country is to accept pre-Columbian or traditional practices that are not in conflict with Catholic dogma. While a large number of members of evangelical congregations are indigenous, local evangelical leaders often describe traditional religious practices as “witchcraft” or “devil worship,” and actively discourage their indigenous members from becoming involved with traditional religious practices.

Evangelical Protestant churches are split 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 weak. However, in April 2002, the Ecumenical Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, a coalition primarily made up of Catholic and evangelical churches originally formed to assist in the negotiation of the Peace Accords, announced its intent to begin monitoring government efforts to fulfill the Accords, particularly on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Ecumenical Forum sponsored public conferences and debates on this topic throughout the country. The Ecumenical Forum’s leadership council continues to meet on a monthly basis, maintaining dialog between most religious groups operating in the country.

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 officials at various levels, including the Ambassador, met on many occasions with leaders of major religious institutions within the country as well as religious-based NGOs. 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. USAID also supports bilingual education based on the Maya worldview, including core spiritual values for indigenous children. 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.

GUYANA

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

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. In the period covered by this report the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), for the first time, began to enforce tax obligations on missionaries working in the country, including demanding back taxes for years that certain missionaries had received letters of exemption. Demand for the back taxes may, in some cases, constitute an onerous burden and may result in forcing the affected missionaries to leave the country.

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 is either practicing or nominally Christian—of this group, roughly one-third is Anglican, one-quarter is Roman Catholic, and one-quarter is Pentecostal and Baptist; smaller percentages are Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, Mormon, and Jehovah's Witness. Practicing or nominal Hindus constitute approximately 33 percent of the population, and Muslims (both Sunni and Shi'a) constitute about 15 percent. There are also a small number of Baha'is. Although not included in official figures, substantial numbers of persons practice Rastafarianism 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 foreign missionaries from a wide variety of denominations 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 strives to protect 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.

In the period covered by this report, the Government began to apply a more stringent interpretation of the tax codes. As a result, missionaries who had previously received exemptions from taxation were required to pay taxes on income received from outside the country. The Government billed several Christian missionaries for back taxes for years during which they had received exemptions. The cumulative effect of these requirements constitutes an onerous financial burden, and has resulted in some missionaries being forced to leave the country. Although notification of the new procedures has been poor and implementation inconsistent, there is no indication that they are being selectively applied to any particular religious group, or for the purposes of religious discrimination.

The Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths present in the country and does not require any special licensing or registration.

The following seven religious holidays are considered as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Christmas (Christian); Phagwah, Diwali (Hindu); Youman Nabi, Eid-ul-Adha (Muslim). None of these holidays negatively impact any religious groups.

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 Gov-

ernment 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 free 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 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, tensions are generally racially, not religiously based. Religious leaders have worked together frequently to attempt to bridge these gaps. A published thesis, including a claim that the Hindu caste system contributes to racial discrimination, has received considerable attention, but there is no indication that the argument has been accepted by a significant number of people.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government 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. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met on numerous occasions with the leaders of religious groups and with foreign missionaries. The Embassy pursues a policy of active engagement with the Islamic community. The Ambassador spoke before various religious groups promoting religious and racial harmony during the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, the Embassy made inquiries with the country's financial and revenue authorities to ascertain the extent of the new tax procedures, and to help ensure non-discriminatory treatment.

HAITI

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 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, it is estimated that approximately 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 also are 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. Even though the Government officially recognized Voodoo as a religion in April, Voodoo continues to

be frowned upon by elite, conservative Catholics and Protestants. Additionally, the official announcement taken by the Government provided no legal status for Voodoo except for its recognition as a legitimate religious practice.

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 the country on short-term humanitarian, educational or evangelical projects.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy are active in politics. A Protestant pastor leads a political party, the Christian Movement for a New Haiti (MOCHRENA). Several Catholic priests are among the leadership of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who is himself a former Roman Catholic priest. The Director General of the Office of Religious Affairs, a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults, is a Roman Catholic 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 for a solution to the political impasse between the ruling FL and the opposition. In May 2002, the country's Catholic and Protestant churches organized a "weekend of prayer" to end the political crisis, with other members of society participating. The CEH and the Papal Nuncio increasingly have become active participants in the two-year search for a solution to the political impasse between the ruling FL and the opposition. For example, in June 2002, CEH president Bishop Hubert Constant and the Papal Nuncio arranged and hosted a key meeting between President Aristide and the opposition. Bishop Constant and CEH Vice President, Archbishop Guy Poulard publicly commented on the political crisis and on the responsibilities of the country's politicians.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the right to practice all religions and faiths, provided that practices do not disturb law and order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect 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 customs 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 the past several years, the Government has recognized the growing role of Protestant churches. For example, Protestant clergy are now invited to participate 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 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, northern, and southern areas of the country. Tensions between Protestant and voodoo groups are local in nature and usually involve land disputes and 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. Government 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 representative religious leaders 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.

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 approximately 6.5 million. An estimated 90 percent of the country's population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), with small numbers of Amerindians, and persons of European, African, and Asian descent 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 January 2002, the Le Vote company conducted personal interviews on religious issues with persons age 18 or older in 1,215 households throughout the country. The company reported that 63 percent of the respondents identified themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Christians and 14 percent identified themselves as "other" 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 evangelical churches 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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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 Government does not require religious groups to register with the Government. Religious groups are eligible for tax exempt status, but to qualify they must submit an application through the Ministry of Government and Justice.

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, bylaws, and goals to the Ministry of Government and Justice. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is 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. The Ministry generally grants such permits; the resolution granting residency then is registered with the Directorate General of Population and Migration Policy.

There are religious schools and church-operated schools; 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. In 2001 the Government returned

one historic church property, and returned several stolen colonial religious articles after confiscating them from a collector who was selling them illegally.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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; however, the legislation has not been put into effect.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL 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.

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. 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 were improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government recognized the Rastafarian religion in the settlement of a lawsuit, which allowed clergy of the Church of Haile Selassie I to visit and worship with prisoners. Marijuana, which is used as part of Rastafarian religious practice, remains prohibited. 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.

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 2001 census, 24 percent of the population identify themselves as members of the Church of God, 11 percent as Seventh-day Adventist, 7 percent as Baptist, 10 percent as Pentecostal, 4 percent as Anglican, 2 percent as Roman Catholic, 2 percent as United Church, 2 percent as Methodist, 2 percent as members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 percent as Moravian, 1 percent as Brethren, 3 percent unstated, and 10 percent as "other." The category "other" includes Hindus, Jews (of whom there are approximately 350), and Rastafarians. There are an estimated 5,000 Muslims. Of those surveyed, 21 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation.

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.

Legal recognition of a religion is facilitated by an act of Parliament, which may 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 February, the Government recognized Rastafarianism as a religion. An out-of-court settlement following a suit brought by the Public Defender gave Rastafarian prisoners the right to have clergy visit and worship with them. However, smoking marijuana as a sacrament of worship remains prohibited.

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.

Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are national holidays. These holidays do not adversely affect any religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect For Religious Freedom

In August 2001, the Public Defender's Office filed a lawsuit against the Government on behalf of a Rastafarian prisoner who charged that he was denied the right to worship. The prisoner claimed that he had no rights to the ministrations by clergy afforded to prisoners of other religions, and that he was denied use of the prison chapel for a Rastafarian baptism. The Church of Haile Selassie I also was named as an applicant on the grounds that its right to minister to a congregation was denied. The Commissioner of Corrections and Attorney General were named as respondents in the suit. In February, an out-of-court settlement was reached, which gave government recognition to the religion. The agreement stated that Rastafarian prisoners are entitled under the Constitution to have their church conduct acts of worship with them.

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.

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, and government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government continued to strengthen efforts to promote interfaith understanding and dialog, and to mediate cases of religious intolerance.

A generally amicable relationship among the various religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, in certain southern parts of the country, polit-

ical, 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 761,606 square miles, and its population is approximately 97.5 million.

According to the 2000 census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Computation (INEGI), approximately 88 percent of the respondents identified themselves at least nominally as Roman Catholic. The latest statistics available show that 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 approximately 1.62 percent; other Protestant evangelical groups, approximately 2.87 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, approximately 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants, approximately 0.71 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, approximately 0.58 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), approximately 0.25 percent; Jewish, approximately 0.05 percent; and other religions, approximately 0.31 percent. Approximately 3.53 percent of respondents indicated "no religion," and 0.85 percent did not specify a religion.

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; Anglicans, 0.1 percent; Baptists, 0.1 percent; Lutherans, 0.01 percent; and Methodists, 0.04 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 persons; 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. Press reports have estimated that there are more than 5,000 Protestant churches and 7,000 pastors.

There are a number of foreign religious workers present in the country. According to statistics from the Secretariat of Government's Under Secretariat of Religious Affairs, 58,460 individuals entered the country and registered as ministers with the Government between November 1992 and May 15, 2003. Ministers are defined in this context as any person to whom a registered religious organization has conferred the title.

There are currently 6,619 religious associations registered with the Federal Government, of which a vast majority are Protestant evangelical and non-Protestant Christian. Non-Christian groups represent a very small percentage of registered associations. 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. Non-Catholics represent approximately 29.6 percent of the population of Tabasco state, followed by Campeche state at approximately 28.7 percent, and Quintana Roo state at approximately 26.8 percent.

There is a small population of Muslims in the city of Torreon, Coahuila, and a group of approximately 300 in the San Cristobal de las Casas area in Chiapas.

In early 2002, a Roman Catholic Church official in Chiapas told the press that some 12 percent of that state's residents identified themselves as "non-believers," with 64 percent of the state's residents identifying as Roman Catholic and 22 percent as Protestant evangelical. In indigenous communities in Chiapas, the number of residents identifying themselves as Roman Catholic is even lower, according to one press report. A December 2001 article reported that in the Chol area, only 56.3 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholic, in the Tzeltal, 54.7 percent, and in the Tzotzil, 51.9 percent.

Some indigenous people 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 lead-

ers often are reported to manipulate religious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit (see Sections II and III).

According to news reports in 2000, 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.

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, but 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. In August 2001, a provision was added to the Constitution that establishes for the first time a constitutional prohibition against any form of discrimination, including discrimination against persons on the basis of religion.

In order to operate legally, religious associations must register with the Under Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Federal Secretariat of Government (SSAR). Although the Government rejects applications because of incomplete documentation, the registration process is routine. The latest statistics available show an estimated 6,619 religious associations are registered. During the period covered by this report, the SSAR registered 17 associations. In addition, 116 applications either awaited further supporting documentation or were not in compliance with registration criteria at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 fails, the parties may 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 and 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 have not always been aggressive in pursuing legal remedies against local leaders (see Section III).

The SSAR investigated 27 cases during 2002 and another 12 during the first half of 2003 and reportedly resolved 14 cases. Five states—Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and Mexico State—have their own under secretaries for religious affairs. One more state, Nuevo Leon, is considering establishing a similar office.

The existing situation of religious freedom reflects the historic tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern state. Consequently, severe restrictions on the rights of the Church and members of the clergy were written into the country's present Constitution. 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.

The Constitution provides that education should avoid privileges of religion. Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools; however, religious associations are free to maintain their own private schools, which receive no public funds. Primary level home schooling for religious reasons is not prohibited explicitly 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.

Religious associations must notify the Government of their intent to hold a religious meeting outside of a licensed place of worship. The Government received 6,009 such notifications during the period from June 2002 to May 2003. In October 2002,

a Jehovah's Witnesses gathering drew almost 90,000 followers to the Aztec Stadium in a three-day celebration of their faith. One thousand one hundred followers were baptized into the faith during the celebration.

The Government requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or to convert existing buildings into new churches. The latest statistics available show that the Government granted permits for 726 buildings between June 1, 2001, and May 31, 2002. In the cases of 576 pending applications, the SSAR has requested additional information. The information required ranges from technical data about the building in question, to proof that a building's owner consents to its conversion into a religious facility. Religious groups report no difficulty in obtaining government permission for these activities.

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

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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution bars members of the clergy from holding public office, advocating partisan political views, supporting political candidates, or opposing the laws or institutions of the State. However, on May 25, representatives of the political party Mexico Possible brought a complaint before the Federal Elections Institute (IFE) accusing the Bishop of Cuernavaca (Morelos State) of violating article 130 of the Constitution and article 404 of the Penal Code. Both articles state that religious ministers cannot call for their followers to vote for or against a political party. While the Bishop did not call for voting specifically against Mexico Possible, he did say that it was a sin to vote in favor of candidates who favor homosexuality and a woman's right to choose, platforms that Mexico Possible espouses. Representatives for Mexico Possible are also considering lodging complaints against the Bishops of Queretaro, Tlaxcala, and Acapulco (Guerrero) for similar violations. The Under Secretariat for Religious Affairs is debating whether or not the Bishops violated the Religious Associations law, and a public discussion ensued on whether or not there should be reforms to article 130 of the Constitution. The Bishops are subject to a fine of up to 20,000 minimum salary days (equivalent to approximately 80,000 USD) under the Religious Associations law and a fine of up to 500 minimum salary days (approximately 2,000 USD) under the Federal Penal Code.

To visit the country for religious purposes, foreign religious workers must secure government permission. Though the Federal Government limits the number of visas each religious group is allowed, the application procedure is essentially a routine and fairly uncomplicated process. The Government has granted 41,742 such visas since 1994, including 7,812 between June 1, 2001 and April 30, 2003.

According to the Religious Associations law, religious groups 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. Between June 1, 2002, and May 30, 2003, the authorities approved 12,906 transmissions.

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 are "national patrimony" and owned by the State. According to the latest statistics available from the Secretariat of Government, there were 90,879 buildings dedicated to religious activities as of July 31, 2001. Of those, 80,846 were property of the State and 10,033 belonged to religious groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the Government generally respects this right in practice, poor enforcement mechanisms have failed to prevent local authorities in the state of Chiapas from discriminating against persons based on their religious beliefs. This is particularly evident in the failure of federal and local governments to punish those responsible for acts of religiously motivated violence. 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. 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 (see Section III). Religious differences often were a prominent feature of such

incidents; however, ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power were frequently the underlying causes of the problems. In past years, expulsions involved the burning of homes and crops, beatings, and, occasionally, killings. During the period covered by this report, there were at least five persons killed and several wounded in incidents that had a religious dimension. 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 the displaced.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to strengthen efforts to promote interfaith understanding. It sponsored new programs and coordinated interfaith dialog.

On March 1, the CNDH issued its recommendation number 5/2003 to 31 state governors and the Secretary of Public Education (SEP). The recommendation calls for the SEP and governors to issue instructions to all entities within their jurisdiction to stop the practice of sanctioning students who, because of their religious beliefs, do not participate in civic ceremonies rendering honors to the national anthem and flag. The practice has been particularly discriminatory to students of Jehovah's Witnesses. According to the CNDH, it has received 1,110 complaints of discrimination on religious grounds, especially against Jehovah's Witnesses adherents, during the period June 1991 to March 2003. The CNDH also called on the Governor of Michoacan to reinstate seven students of the indigenous Mazahua community of Crescencio Morales belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses who were expelled from the Benito Juarez school in 2001 for refusing to participate in civic ceremonies rendering honors to the national anthem and flag.

On May 17 and 18, followers of Krishna held their first ever Ratha Yatra festival in Mexico City. While the festival has been celebrated for many years in other cities, this was the first time it was held in the capital city.

In October 2002, Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman Jose Moreno declared to almost 90,000 followers gathered at the Aztec Stadium that discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses has diminished in the past few years. He cited that during 2000–2001 there were only 200 cases of discrimination of Jehovah's Witnesses children with problems in receiving education, compared with 3,000 cases in 1992–93. He also highlighted that the Secretariat of Education had established criteria to prevent children from being discriminated against on the basis of their religion.

In October 2002, the Federal Government announced plans to reform the current Religious Associations law. The changes proposed include allowing religious associations to own non-print mass media communications entities, allowing government officials to attend religious acts, recognizing conscientious objectors, and opening prisons and health institutions to "spiritual help."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among the various religions; however, there are cases of religious intolerance and expulsions from certain indigenous communities, particularly those in Chiapas, whose residents follow syncretistic (Catholic/Mayan) religious practices. 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 at times has 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. Abuses related to these inci-

dents apparently did not occur solely on the basis of religion. While religious differences often were 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 go partly to local celebrations of Catholic religious holidays, and resist participating in festivals involving alcohol.

There were a number of cases of religious intolerance caused by societal attitudes during the period covered by this report, the majority of which occurred in Chiapas.

On January 28, five persons—two state policemen, two municipal officials, and a civilian—were ambushed and killed in the community of Tres Cruces, municipality of San Juan Chamula. Catholic members of the community blamed evangelicals for the ambush, but Roman Catholic Church officials issued a statement declaring that the event was not due primarily to religious motives.

The community of Mitzitón, in the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, was the location of two incidents in February 2003, and two other incidents in October 2002. On February 8, 2003, unidentified gunmen fired at a vehicle belonging to Sixto Heredia Gómez, an evangelical Tzotzil from the area. Heredia stopped short of accusing any particular group but claimed that traditionalist Catholics of the area were upset because of the presence of evangelicals in the community. Two days later, on February 10, in the same community, the home of Pedro Gómez López, located in the El Chiverio neighborhood, was burned down. Gómez López stated that he suspected traditionalist Catholic leaders were behind the arson. In October 2002, unknown persons cut a power line to an evangelical pastor's property in Mitzitón. Later that month, a group of 20 assailants dragged the pastor from his home, beat him, and threatened to kill him unless he left Mitzitón.

On March 2, traditional Catholics in Los Pozos, municipality of Huixtán, Chiapas, destroyed an evangelical church. The traditional Catholics prevented evangelical churchgoers from celebrating the fourth anniversary of the church's founding at the church on February 28. Two days later, the wood structure was burned down, and local traditional leaders jailed eight of the evangelicals for several days.

Traditionalist local leaders have denied approximately 130 children of evangelicals access to the local public schools in 6 communities every year since 1994. In August 2002, a confrontation between traditionalist Catholics and Protestant evangelicals in the community of Tzajaltetic, in the municipality of San Juan Chamula, left five persons wounded. The incident occurred when Catholics did not allow Protestant parents to register their children at the local school. The Chiapas state Secretariat of Government (SEGOB) initiated a dialog with both parties to reach an agreement and avoid future confrontations.

In November 2002, seven indigenous persons were wounded in a clash in the community of Tzetelton, in the municipality of San Juan Chamula. According to initial press reports, a group of indigenous evangelical Protestants attacked a group of Roman Catholics meeting in a school to plan for the December 12 Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Other press accounts reported the seven were wounded accidentally by the men in the school firing at the evangelicals defending themselves from an attack by a group of traditionalist Catholics. Members of the evangelical community alleged that local police would not protect them and at times sided with the traditionalist Catholics.

In November 2002, a group of indigenous Jehovah's Witnesses families abandoned their homes in the the communities of Tzajaltetic and Botatulan, in the municipality of San Juan Chamula. The group fled for fear of attacks against them by local groups of Catholics.

Several persons accused of being witches have been killed in Chiapas during the last decade. On April 14, residents in the community of Rancho Narvaez, in the municipality of San Juan Chamula, burned alive Domingo Xilon Xilon, accused of practicing witchcraft. Authorities have no leads in the case.

In September 2002, near San Juan Chamula, unidentified gunmen shot to death four adults and wounded five others, including two children. One of those killed was Diego Hernández López, whom local residents had accused of practicing witchcraft, according to the police.

Government officials, the national human rights ombudsman, and interfaith groups are conducting discussions about incidents of intolerance in some parts of the south, 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 period covered by this report, Embassy staff met with government officials, staff of nongovernmental organizations, and members of religious groups to discuss and raise religious freedom issues.

Embassy staff took part in the International Forum on Religious Freedom organized by the Secretariat of Government in Mexico City on October 17–18, 2002. On September 1, 2002, Embassy staff participated in the Mexico Episcopal Conference's celebration of International Migrant Day at the Basilica of Guadalupe. Diplomatic missions from 23 other countries also participated.

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 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.2 million. More than 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, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Amish and Mennonite communities, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Some 8.5 percent professed no religious affiliation or were atheists. The Episcopal Church claims a membership of nearly twice the figure identified as Episcopalians by the census and the evangelical churches also have made credible claims of higher current membership ranging from 20 to 30 percent of the population. According to a January 2003 poll of 1,500 citizens that excluded the Atlantic Coast, where there is a greater prevalence of Protestant churches, 70.5 percent of respondents were Catholic, 16.1 were members of evangelical churches, and 3.2 percent belonged to other denominations, while 9.8 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

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 of fewer than 50 persons (including expatriates). They gather for religious holidays and Sabbath dinners, but do not have an ordained rabbi or a synagogue.

There are approximately 200 Muslims, primarily resident aliens, or naturalized Nicaraguans from Iran, Libya, and Palestine, who immigrated to the country in the 1980s. There is 1 mosque in Managua with approximately 100 members. Minority religions also include the Baha'i Faith 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 1900s, and the Chinese, who either arrived as Christians or converted to Christianity, and frequently intermarried with native citizens.

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 people, 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 in the pre-Colombian era.

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 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, there were 762 churches and approximately 124,000 baptized members. The evangelical churches operate two private universities without interference from the Government.

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 freely in the country. The Mormons have 212 missionaries, the Mennonites have 4 missionary families, 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 strives to protect 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 Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

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. There are allegations that state funds have been used to support church-related activities that are purely religious in nature. However, the Administration of President Enrique Bolanos has been more distant with the Church hierarchy than was the previous administration, and the Church hierarchy has publicly sided with ex-President Aleman in his fight against charges of corruption. The historical position of the Church is such that most religiously affiliated monuments, memorials, and holidays are Catholic-related. However, the predominance of the Catholic Church does not have a negative effect on the religious freedom of others.

Evangelicals are free to be politically active, and have formed a political party called Partido Camino Cristiano, or Christian Path Party. The party has 4 legislators in the 92-member National Assembly including 1 ordained evangelical minister, Guillermo Osorno.

The Government's requirements for legal recognition of a religious group are similar to its requirements for other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). A church must apply for "Personeria Juridica" (legal standing), which the National Assembly must approve. Following Assembly approval, a church must register with the Ministry of Government as an association or a foundation. Groups that do not register cannot obtain tax-exempt status and technically do not have standing to make legal obligations and contracts, although a number of groups have not registered, but continue to operate without penalty.

A recognized church may be granted tax-exempt status, known as exoneration. Exoneration is a contentious issue, particularly with regard to exemption from customs duties on imported goods donated for humanitarian purposes. Goods donated to established churches and other nonprofit religious organizations recognized by the Government that are intended for the exclusive use of the church or organization are eligible for exoneration from duties. Groups must receive 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 is approved and the goods released.

A number of churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, including the Assemblies of God, reported bureaucratic delays in obtaining exoneration from customs duties for humanitarian aid in the form of donated goods, although most reported that such delays had decreased significantly since 2001. Some non-Catholic churches complained that the Catholic Church received preferential 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 exoneration from duties on donated goods. In April, the National Assembly approved a new Tax Equity Law that attempted to streamline the process of obtaining exoneration. Under the new law, all groups must re-qualify for exoneration. However, many religious groups felt that this legislation would improve the process for obtaining exoneration, although it remains largely untested.

In October 2002, the Government closed down radio station "La Poderosa" when it determined that its license, held by the Commission for the Promotion of the Archdiocese (COPROSA), an NGO founded by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, was invalid because COPROSA had not completed all of the requirements to register legally as an NGO with the Ministry of Government. La Poderosa broadcast language that sometimes incited attacks on the personal security of President Bolaos, and other public officials. Other media and some political leaders sharply criticized the closing of La Poderosa while at the same time stressing the need for all media to follow ethical standards, and engage in better self-regulation.

Missionaries do not face any special requirements other than obtaining 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 free 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 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.

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.

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 approximately 2.9 million.

According to a 1998 nationwide survey conducted by the Comptroller General's Office of Statistics and Census, 82 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 10 percent as evangelicals, and 3 percent as unaffiliated with any religious group. There are also small but statistically identifiable congregations—approximately 34,000—of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalians (approximately 9,000 members), and other Christians. Many recent Chinese immigrants still practice Buddhism. The country has small but influential Jewish (approximately 10,000 members) and Muslim (approximately 5,000 adherents) communities, and is home to 1 of the world's 7 Baha'i Houses of Worship.

Members of the Catholic faith are found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also are dispersed geographically, but tend to be from a lower socio-economic stratum. The mainstream Protestant denominations derive their membership from the Antillean black and expatriate communities, both concentrated in Panama and Colon provinces. The wealthy, relatively large, and influential Jewish community is largely concentrated in Panama City. Muslims live primarily in Panama City and Colon, with smaller concentrations in David and other provincial cities.

Many religious organizations have foreign religious workers in the country. For example, as of May the Mormons had about 195 missionaries in the country, and the Lutheran Church had 7. As of 1999 (the latest figure available), the Southern Baptist Convention had 22 foreign missionaries. The Seventh-day Adventists had 8 foreign missionaries, all from neighboring Central American nations.

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 Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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 the consideration given to it in the Constitution generally have not prejudiced other religions. However, Catholicism does enjoy certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Panama enjoys privileges and immunities not afforded to other religious leaders, and 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.

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

During 2001–2002, the Government reached agreement with a number of religious organizations over the acquisition of title to properties that these groups occupied in the former Panama Canal Zone. These agreements enabled several of the

religious organizations to move ahead with new plans for these properties, including the construction of a temple by the Mormons.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Department of Immigration 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 strictly limits the type of public offices that ministers of religious faiths 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 the forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL 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 Mormons and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) is not widespread.

Mainstream denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches, participate in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. The Committee sponsors inter-religious conferences to discuss matters of faith and practice and plans joint liturgical celebrations and charitable projects. In conjunction 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 also is 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. The Ecumenical Committee is also part of a larger umbrella group of some three dozen business, political, religious, and civic groups forming the United Nations Development Program-sponsored Vision 2020 group. Vision 2020 seeks to develop consensus goals for addressing issues of pressing concern, such as democratic institutions, economic development, ethics, and environmental sustainability.

In May 2001, the Jewish congregation Kol Shearith celebrated its 125th anniversary. Government officials and members of the Christian, Muslim, Baha’i, Buddhist, and more than 30 other religious communities attended the commemoration, which was billed as a celebration of religious freedom.

Over the last decade, local religious leaders have become more outspoken in the ongoing debate on corruption. Panama City Catholic Archbishop Jose Dimas Cedeno has spoken out several times in the past two years, asking that the Government investigate and remedy corruption. Episcopalian Bishop Julio Murray maintained a high profile as a member of the Government’s Truth Commission, which investigated deaths and disappearances during the period of military rule.

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.

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 5,885,000 persons (2002 estimate).

An estimated 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. There are active Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical Christian, Jewish (both Orthodox and Reform congregations), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baha'i communities in the country. There is an Islamic community concentrated in the Department of Alto Parana, an area that received substantial immigration from the Middle East, especially Lebanon. There is also a substantial Mennonite community, concentrated principally in the western Department of Boqueron, whose members originally came to the country to escape religious persecution. These refugees immigrated 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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion.

All religious groups must be registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture; the criteria for recognition appear to be minimal. Furthermore, the Government enforces few controls on these groups and many informal churches exist.

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

The Paraguayan military has an extensive Roman Catholic chaplain program. The Church considers this chaplaincy as a diocese unto itself and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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 Hanukkah. Protestant evangelical groups such as the Assembly of God and Mormons conduct missionary activities without government interference.

The Catholic Church is involved in politics at the fringe, mostly in socio-economic matters, and does not support any particular political party. In this year's presidential election, some in the governing Colorado Party (ANR) accused the Church of supporting the Patria Querida (PQ) movement's presidential candidate, Pedro Fadul. The Church as an institution neither endorsed nor supported any candidate. The Church freely criticizes the Government.

As incoming President Nicanor Duarte Frutos assembled his cabinet mid-year, the local press commented favorably upon his nomination of several Mennonites to be

ministers, reflecting a popular belief that Mennonites will transpose their honesty and efficient industry to government.

In May 2002, a building in Asuncion was spray-painted with anti-Semitic graffiti, in the first such incident in 15 years. Results of the police investigation were not known at the end of the period covered by this report.

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. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials meet regularly with representatives of different religious groups.

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.

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 area of 496,226 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. Using the most recent census information (1993), the National Statistics Institute (INEI) estimates that Protestants, the majority of whom are evangelicals or Pentecostals, constitute 7.2 percent of the population. This contrasts with the National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimate that evangelicals represent approximately 12 percent of the total population, or 2.75 million persons. INEI's estimate also includes non-evangelical Christians such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. INEI estimates that adherents of non-Christian religions, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Shintoists, accounted for approximately 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constituted 1.4 percent of the population. Comparing 1972 and 1993 census statistics, INEI estimates that evangelical membership grew by 133 percent at the time that Catholic membership decreased by 10 percent and membership in other religions decreased by 60 percent.

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 Catholic Church, and a Concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. The dominant status accorded to Roman Catholicism in public life manifests itself

in various ways. The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion.

Congress is addressing the issue of Church-State relations in ongoing deliberations over revisions to the Constitution. The revised draft of the Constitution would continue to recognize the special role of the Roman Catholic Church in the country's historical, social and cultural development, as expressed in Article 50 of the current Constitution. However, the Congressional Committee on Constitutional Affairs also approved a draft amendment, which reads: "The State recognizes and respects all religious denominations and establishes agreements of cooperation with them, through its representative agents, with fairness to all." The language of the draft amendment would provide other religious groups with the opportunity to enter into agreements with the Government on a basis similar to that enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

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 eligibility for exemption from certain import taxes and customs duties. The Unit did not receive any discrimination complaints during the period covered by this report.

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 the law discriminates against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles, that they bring into the country, while the Catholic Church has not been taxed on such items.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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. 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 to 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), a nongovernmental organization (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 November 2001, the Jehovah's Witness Association of Peru complained that since 1997 the Ministry of Education had delayed the approval of customs duty exemption on donations of such materials from abroad, and in most cases, had rejected requests for customs duties exemptions by their Association. In February 2002, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that they had to provide a surety to release the donated material from Customs. By April 2002, the Association had filed two legal actions to uphold their right as a non-profit educational entity to be exonerated from payment of duties on such materials. Both actions were pending in the courts at the end of the period covered by this report; however, in May 2002, a Superior Court ordered the temporary suspension of the surety fees the Association had been assessed to release the donated material from Customs.

The General Education law of 1998 mandated that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum throughout the education process (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Some non-Catholic or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. 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. Unlike in previous years, during the period covered by this report, there were no complaints

that requests for exemptions from Catholic religious instruction had been denied. 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. In December 2000, PROLIBCO lost a challenge by approximately 90 persons from various non-Catholic churches to this education practice in the Supreme Court. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is considering the case.

PROLIBCO is supporting an initiative by two non-sectarian (and antireligious) organizations, the Lima-based Movimiento Arreligioso Peruano and Masa Peru, to eliminate from the Constitution any reference to the Catholic Church. PROLIBCO also is seeking to collect enough signatures to ask the Constitutional Court to rule on the constitutionality of the 1980 Concordat.

By law, the military may hire only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion of military personnel. A November 1999 Government decree creating 40 military Catholic chaplaincies compelled members of the armed forces and the police, as well as their civilian co-workers and relatives, to participate in their services.

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 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.

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

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. 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 groups. 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.

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 2-island federation, has a total area of 104 square miles, and its population is approximately 39,000. Christianity is the dominant religion, with most adhering to Anglican beliefs. There are also Catholic, Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witness faiths. The minority religions include Rastafarianism, and the Baha'i Faith.

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 strives to protect 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. 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 free 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 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 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. The St. Kitts 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 issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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, 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 238 square miles, and its population is approximately 162,157. Christianity is the dominant religion, with Roman Catholics accounting for approximately 65 percent of the population. There also are Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witness faiths. The minority religions include Rastafarianism, and the Baha'i Faith.

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 strives to protect 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. 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 free 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 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.

In May, the St. Lucia High Court sentenced two Rastafarian men to hang. They were charged with murder and arson in the December 2000 killing of a nun and priest who had been set on fire, along with other congregation members, during a Catholic Mass in the capital of Castries. The Catholic Church now conducts widely publicized Cathedral Security Services each Sunday and on all feast days. There have been signs of religious intolerance within the community; however, the Government strongly criticizes and investigates such events.

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.

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 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. Vincent and a chain of smaller islands, the Grenadines, has a total area of 150 square miles, and its population is approximately 116,400. Christianity is the dominant religion, with most adhering to Anglican beliefs. There are also Seventh-day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Pentecostal faiths. The minority religions include Rastafarianism, the Baha'i faith and Islam.

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 strives to protect 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. 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 free 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 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 hold Rastafarianism in high regard because of its popular association with marijuana 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 issues with the Government, local groups, and other organizations in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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. More than 30 percent of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, another 30 percent is of African descent, 15 to 20 percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and smaller percentages of the population 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 the Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, and 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. Several groups of Druids are present in the country. There are also 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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion. The Constitution prohibits religious discrimination.

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 interfaith services in Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism. Military members also are welcome to attend other religious services.

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.

There are five religious holidays considered national holidays: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Id ul Fitre (Muslim), and Christmas (Christian). Citizens of all faiths tend to celebrate these holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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 degrees.

In April 2002, the police informed Jewish community leaders that the police had received a threat to set fire to the country's main (and only active) synagogue. Synagogue leaders increased security. No suspects had been identified by the end of the period covered by this report.

There is an Inter Religious Council (IRIS) composed of representatives from various religious groups. Council members meet once a month to discuss planned ecumenical and other activities.

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. The U.S. Embassy maintains a dialog with leaders of the country's religious communities.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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 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), approximately 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 traditional Caribbean religions with African roots. Sometimes these are practiced together with other faiths.

Afro-Trinidadians are predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and are historically concentrated in the area of Port-of-Spain and the east-west corridor of Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, is overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo-Trinidadians are historically concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and are divided among those of Hindu and Muslim faiths along with some representative Presbyterians. Ethnic divisions in political life are reflected in the messages and ceremonies of political parties, which sometimes carry religious overtones. For example, the United National Congress (UNC) party, whose supporters are predominantly of Indian descent, occasionally incorporates Hindu references and cultural expressions in its public events.

Foreign missionaries present include members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Mennonites, and Muslims. The Mormons maintain 34 foreign missionaries, 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 strives to protect 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, regardless of 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 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.

In the Government, the portfolio of ecclesiastical affairs falls under the Office of the Prime Minister-Social Service Delivery, which administers annual financial grants to religious organizations, and issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law 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, and provides for prosecution for the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally do not favor any one religion publicly. In recent years, the Government has strengthened legal prohibitions against religious discrimination by amending legislation to remove certain discriminatory religious references. The process of judicial review is available to those who are victims of religious discrimination. For example, in the 1995 case of Sumayyah Mohammed vs. Moraine and Another, a Muslim student who had been prohibited from modifying her school uniform to conform with religious requirements was granted redress on constitutional grounds.

The Government has set aside public holidays for every religious group with significant followings, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. The Government grants financial and technical assistance to various organizations for religious festivals and celebrations.

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, and pro-

vides the prayer leader for several official events, such as the opening of Parliament and the annual court term.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 35 per religious denomination. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa, must represent a registered religious group, and may not remain in the country for more than 3 years.

Citizens are not denied the opportunity to serve in the military because of religious beliefs. The military service is predominantly Afro-Trinidadian and Christian, and the military maintains a part-time chaplain to provide Christian religious services. Military personnel also have access to other religious services in their local communities.

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 \$2.5 million (TTD 15.3 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 (TTD 2.1 million) for destruction of its facilities during the same coup. In connection with its efforts to prevent terrorist acts, the Government also monitors the rhetoric of certain independent mosques for any incitement to religiously motivated violence.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

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 virtually all faiths with significant followings in the country, promotes interfaith dialog and tolerance through study groups, publications, and cultural and religious exhibitions. The bylaws of the IRO do not exclude any specific groups from membership; however the Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists do not participate because of doctrinal differences, and in 1993, the Mormons applied for IRO membership, but was not accepted.

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 objections may reflect racial tensions that at times arise between the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian communities.

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.

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. Approximately 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.

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 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 strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on religion.

There is a strict separation of church and state, which dates from the beginning of the 20th century. All religions are entitled to receive tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. For houses of worship to receive tax exemptions, 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 status is granted 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 Ministry of Interior provides religious groups with public support, traffic control, and crowd control for religious celebrations that are not official holidays.

The Penal Code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The House of Deputies Constitutional Legislative Affairs Commission is revising the Code to broaden the definition of hate crimes, and thereby make it easier for police to classify certain offenses as hate crimes and to provide the judicial system with the tools necessary to sentence violators to jail.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 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. There are several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote interfaith understanding.

Early in the year, a limited outbreak of anti-Semitic graffiti and propaganda received media attention. Several Uruguayan figures, including a former minister, were defamed in the graffiti and there were reports of harassment by telephone. This resulted in swift action by the police, who arrested a small cell of three juvenile

so-called “skinheads” and confiscated weapons that included a .22 caliber pistol. The adolescents were indicted and were awaiting trial at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2001 three students harassed persons by telephoning at random persons with Jewish-sounding surnames. One victim with caller ID reported the harassment to the police, who arrested the students and then released them to their parents, who confined them to their homes during the week. At the end of the period covered by this report, the students reportedly were performing community service on weekends as required by the courts.

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. After being imprisoned for 6 months the subject benefited from a parole program for first-time offenders and was released in 2001. Sources report that the subject has paid restitution; however, he still was under investigation and faced additional related charges at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

During the period covered by this report, embassy staff members met with human rights and religious NGOs 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 area of approximately 350,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 24.5 million. According to the latest government figures, in 2001 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, and promoting awareness

and understanding among the various religious communities. Each local church must register with the DJR 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 its social programs and schools. Other religious groups receive monetary assistance for the repair of buildings for religious use. However, the amount available to non-Catholic groups is less than 7 percent of the 2002–2003 religious subsidy budget.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free 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 has provided the equivalent at the time of more than \$1.5 million (approximately 1.2 billion bolivars) in subsidies to the Catholic Church's schools and social programs that help the poor. Other religious groups are free to establish and run their own schools, which do not receive subsidies from the Government, except in the form of building repairs.

The military chaplain corps is made up exclusively of Roman Catholic priests, and although service members of other faiths are allowed to attend church services of their own religion, they do not have the same access to clergy members that Catholic service members do.

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. Catholic Church representatives had expressed concerns for the Church's autonomy and had claimed that the PIV appeared to be an effort to centralize unduly the social work of various churches and religions. However, in the period covered by this report, the PIV was inactive.

In November 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. Although the Catholic Church expressed its concern, the ruling had no impact in practice on Church activities during the period covered by this report.

Foreign missionaries require a special visa to enter the country, which is obtained through consulates in the missionary's home country. Missionaries generally are not refused entry, but many complain that the process of obtaining a visa often takes months or years due to general bureaucratic inefficiency.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In May, Archbishop of Merida, Baltazar E. Porras, accused the Government of seeking to destroy the Catholic Church's credibility by manufacturing scandals aimed at priests and bishops. He described a series of attacks on churches, cathedrals, and priests' houses, whose apparent aim was to create fear, rather than steal objects of value. Prior to at least one attack, normal police presence had been withdrawn after authorities allegedly claimed it was a privilege the Catholic Church should not enjoy. The Archbishop believes the Government wishes to diminish the Church or any institution that the Government perceives as a competitor.

In a speech in June to the Organization of American States General Assembly, Foreign Minister Roy Chaderton, linked Christianity with ethnic persecution, slavery, and mass murder.

In April 2002, the National Guard harassed missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), by conducting unnecessary strip searches and intimidating them. The authorities investigated the incident and disciplined the personnel involved. There have been no further incidents of this nature.

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 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. However, in February, the Israeli Association of Venezuela photographed graffiti on a Caracas synagogue that labeled the members of the Jewish Community fascists and murderers of the Palestinian and Iraqi people. The Government did not investigate the graffiti incident.

The Catholic Church has been a vocal participant in the national political debate. There are numerous ecumenical groups throughout the country.

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.