

HONDURAS

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The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of 7.9 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 8 percent is indigenous, and the rest is principally of European, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup, a Latin American market research and public opinion company, reported that 47 percent of respondents identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 36 percent as evangelical Protestant. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The Evangelical Confederation of Honduras represented the evangelical leadership. There were approximately 2,000 Muslims and 1,000 Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

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There is no state religion. Previously, the government officially recognized only the Catholic Church as a "church." On September 30, the National Congress passed a law recognizing the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as a legally recognized "church," making it the second officially recognized church in the country. Other government-recognized religious organizations were classified as "religious associations" but not as "churches" and did not enjoy the rights and privileges of churches. By law only the legislature has the authority to confer the status of a legally recognized "church." The constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, which provides for tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group from the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras for review. This group may suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the Office of the Solicitor General for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs approved resolutions. The government does not require religious groups to register.

The armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. Each military base commander selected either a Catholic or Protestant chaplain. These 40 chaplains were not military career chaplains but were entitled to a salary and military uniform for the duration of their military chaplaincy. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions.

The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population. The ministry generally grants such permits.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the government prohibited immigration of foreign missionaries who practiced religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allowed deportation of foreigners who practiced witchcraft or religious fraud.

There were religious schools that provided professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provided general education, such as parochial schools. They neither received special treatment from the government nor faced any restrictions.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

The constitution stipulates that only laypersons may seek election to Congress.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

Catholic Church leaders reported vandalism of church property and graffiti painted on the cathedral in Tegucigalpa. On August 6, unknown individuals at the National Autonomous University of Honduras defaced with pornographic imagery the statue of a Catholic priest, an important historical figure. During a September 1 labor demonstration calling for a readjustment of the minimum wage, protestors reportedly smashed stained glass windows of the cathedral in Tegucigalpa. The Catholic Church also reported instances of discrimination against Catholic clergy by individual bureaucrats who were evangelical Christians. At the end of the reporting period, there was no information about government actions to address these incidents.

On October 10, a bullet shattered the window in Cardinal Andres Rodriguez's office. Since the cardinal was out of town at the time, the church did not consider the action to be an assassination attempt. However, the church confirmed that the cardinal had received telephone and other threats on previous occasions.

On November 7, members of the National Popular Resistance Front attacked (but did not injure) Cardinal Rodriguez with water bottles, eggs, and stones. The cardinal was attending Mass at a newly opened church in Comayaguela, near Tegucigalpa. The cardinal's security detail was forced to seek police assistance to safely remove the cardinal from the area. One police officer was injured, and one protestor was briefly taken into custody.

The Catholic archbishop of Tegucigalpa actively promoted ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.