

URUGUAY

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

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

To promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, the U.S. embassy organized events and roundtables that brought together a wide variety of religious leaders to discuss challenges and potential areas for cooperation.

Section I. Religious Demography

The most recent (2007) statistics on religious preference from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate approximately 45 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholics and approximately 11 percent as non-Catholic Christians. Groups that constituted less than 5 percent of the population include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Mormons (3 percent), Afro-Umbandists (3 percent), Jews (0.6 percent), Baha'is, Buddhists, the Unification Church, and Muslims. Approximately 28 percent indicated they believed in God but did not claim a specific religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion, and there is strict separation of church and state. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination provides for government compliance with the laws, and representatives from several religious groups are active participants.

Religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and no group reported difficulties. To receive tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It must then apply to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and may grant religious status. The group must reapply every five years. Once the ministry grants religious status, the group may request an exemption each year from the taxing authority, which is usually the municipal government.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

A blogger expressed strong anti-Semitic comments on the website of one of the national newspapers. The Central Jewish Committee raised the issue with the Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination and with local media. Reportedly, the police apprehended the blogger by tracing his IP address. However, at year's end, it was unknown whether the blogger had been, or would be, charged.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. Traditional Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church. There were several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promoted interfaith understanding.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Members of the embassy regularly met with the leaders of all religious groups, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Protestant groups, and the Afro-Umbandist community. Embassy staff members also maintained regular contact with a range of government institutions and human rights and religious NGOs engaged in supporting religious freedom, such as the Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination, and B'nai B'rith. The embassy hosted events and roundtables that brought together a wide variety of religious leaders to discuss challenges and potential areas for cooperation.