

# DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

## 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.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Additionally, it engaged religious and cultural groups in an effort to celebrate their heritage and traditions.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The largest religious group is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christian groups (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a smaller but growing presence. According to a 2006 population survey by the Gallup Organization, the population was approximately 40 percent Catholic (practicing), 29 percent Catholic (nonpracticing), and 18 percent evangelical Protestant. In the same study, approximately 11 percent stated they had no religion. The Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity claimed evangelicals represented 16 to 20 percent of the population.

There are approximately 350 Jews. Most live in Santo Domingo, which has two synagogues and one rabbi. There is a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua, which is led by a community leader, but there is no ordained rabbi. There are approximately 800 Muslims, including foreign students. There are a small number of Buddhists and Hindus. Some Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santeria), witchcraft (brujeria), or voodoo (vodou), but because these practices are usually concealed the number of adherents is unknown.

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

## **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution now extends to diverse religious groups the right to celebrate religious marriages and provides all civil rights in accordance with the law. This status previously had been an exclusive privilege of the Catholic Church. A new law regulating religious marriages was approved on August 3.

The constitution specifies that there is no state church and provides for freedom of religion and belief. A concordat with the Vatican designates Catholicism as the official religion and extends special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. These include the legal recognition of church law, use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, and complete exoneration from customs duties.

Religious groups are required to register with the government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exoneration from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. The process can be lengthy; however, no requests for customs exoneration were denied during the year.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it was not enforced. Private schools are exempt from this requirement.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Our Lady of Altagracia Day, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Mercedes Day, and Christmas.

## **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

## **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.

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

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Additionally, it engaged religious and cultural groups in an effort to celebrate their heritage and traditions.