

# ARGENTINA

## **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 some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and some reports of anti-Semitism.

U.S. embassy officers regularly discussed religious freedom with community leaders as well as the government. The embassy also supported a program to promote interfaith dialogue and religious understanding among youth, educators, and law enforcement officials.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

A study by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology, released in 2008, estimated that Roman Catholics constitute 76 percent of the population, and Baptists, Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) each total less than 5 percent of the population. Leaders of diverse religious groups noted the recent growth of evangelical Protestant communities. According to independent studies, the Jewish community consists of approximately 200,000-250,000 members.

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

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution (and its partial amendments) and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution grants all residents the right "to profess their faith freely." The law provides the legal framework for religious freedom.

By constitutional and legal obligation, the government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith" and provides tax-exempt subsidies to the Catholic Church

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to compensate for expropriation of church property in the colonial era. The Catholic Church receives institutional privileges such as school subsidies, a large degree of autonomy for parochial schools, and licensing preferences for radio frequencies.

The Secretariat of Worship is responsible for conducting the government's relations with religious organizations. The law stipulates that a non-Catholic religious organization must register with the Secretariat of Worship as a civic (rather than religious) association and must report periodically to maintain its status. The Secretariat of Worship considers having a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy as criteria for registration. Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those in homes, but is necessary for public activities. Registration is necessary to obtain tax-exempt status. According to the Secretariat of Worship, 4,580 religious entities are registered, of which approximately 90 percent are Protestant.

Foreign missionaries of registered religious organizations may apply to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities to request the issuance of the appropriate documents.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which may be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches, synagogues, and mosques operated private schools, including seminaries and universities.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The law authorizes seven days of paid leave for those observing Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, and also for those observing the Islamic New Year.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The federal government and the city of Buenos Aires conducted regular meetings with representatives of religious groups. On December 22 the federal government's oversight agency signed an agreement with representatives of Muslim and Jewish groups to establish a public-private think tank to promote and develop religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity in the public sector. The country

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was also an active member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

On November 25, the Buenos Aires city government, the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom, and the national Secretariat of Worship observed Religious Freedom Day during ceremonies in Buenos Aires. The Buenos Aires Directorate General for Religious Affairs and the national Secretariat of Worship sent official representatives to religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashanah and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), a government agency under the jurisdiction of the Justice Ministry, whose board includes representatives of the major religious groups, investigated violations of a law that prohibits discrimination based on religion and other factors. The agency also supported victims of discrimination and promoted proactive measures to prevent discrimination. INADI's religious freedom forum held monthly meetings with leaders across the religious spectrum.

The international investigation of the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Argentine Mutual Aid Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 persons continued. With Interpol assistance, the federal prosecutor investigating the case continued to seek the arrest of eight Iranians for their alleged involvement in the bombing. In July the Iranian Foreign Ministry notified the government of its interest in "cooperating" in the investigation. However, details of the offer were never publicly released and Iran continued to reject requests to extradite Iranians implicated in the attacks. In September President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner stated that the government "could not and should not" reject Iran's offer of a dialogue, but the government of Iran did not publicly respond to the president's statement by year's end.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and government at different levels responded to incidents of discrimination.

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The Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations (DAIA) maintained a database that tracked anti-Semitic incidents. (No other religious group maintained an equivalent database.) The DAIA received 274 complaints of anti-Semitism during 2010, representing a decrease of 80 percent compared with 2009. The most commonly reported incidents were desecration of Jewish cemeteries, anti-Semitic graffiti, verbal slurs, and other forms of harassment. Jewish organizations highlighted repeated instances of harassment on Internet sites. There were also isolated incidents of assaults on Jewish individuals. For example, in May, a man attacked Rabbi Moshe Cohen, the director of a Jewish orthodox high school in Buenos Aires, shouting anti-Semitic slurs and physically assaulting the rabbi outside the school. City authorities dismissed a Buenos Aires metropolitan police officer after they discovered the officer's membership in an anti-Semitic youth organization. Most complaints were filed in the city of Buenos Aires, and the DAIA claimed that cases in the provinces were likely underreported.

A poll conducted by the Gino Germani Institute of the University of Buenos Aires, commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League and the DAIA, found “ingrained, pervasive” anti-Semitic attitudes. Most poll respondents indicated they believed Jews had too much power in the business world and were more loyal to Israel than to Argentina.

In June DAIA authorities filed a formal complaint with the anti-Semitism division of the Federal Police against union leader Luis D'Elia for making anti-Semitic statements. In a radio interview, D'Elia commented on a court case involving Sergio Schoklender, the financial advisor for the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, who had been indicted along with several colleagues for alleged fraud and misuse of public funds. D'Elia called Schoklender and others under investigation “countrymen,” referring to Israel and Schoklender's Jewish background. The DAIA alleged that D'Elia's statements were “judeophobic” and an attempt to “discredit” Schoklender based on his Jewish background. A public prosecutor indicted D'Elia for allegedly violating the Anti-Discrimination Law, and the case remained open at year's end.

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

U.S. embassy officers met periodically with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and incidents of religious discrimination in the country. In meetings with government officials, embassy officers discussed the status of the AMIA case, as well as governmental efforts to advance religious freedom. Embassy officers

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attended events organized by faith-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations that addressed religious freedom and promoted interfaith awareness and appreciation. The embassy also hosted several events throughout the year with religious community leaders, including a discussion on religious pluralism with local academics, civil society leaders, and a visiting scholar from the United States. The embassy continued to support a program to build understanding among youth from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, including outreach to educators and law enforcement officials to enhance their understanding of different religious practices.