



Peru

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles and a population of 27.2 million. Among the major religious communities are Roman Catholics, various Protestant denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, Assembly of God, and others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, the Baha'i Faith, Hare Krishnas, and Islam. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local religious group, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is unrelated to Israel or Judaism.

The 2006 National Continuous Census conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INEI) finds that 85 percent of the population that identified with a religion is Catholic and 11 percent Protestant; the remaining 4 percent includes Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact. Those who identify themselves as either agnostic or atheist comprise 1.4 percent of the population.

The Catholic nongovernmental organization (NGO) Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only 5 percent of Catholics regularly attend weekly church services.

The membership of most religious groups remained fairly constant, but various evangelical Christian denominations had rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last 20 years, Protestant representation in the population grew from 2 to 3 percent to 10 to 15 percent.

The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, evangelicals resided in smaller communities outside of Lima and in rural areas, but in the last 15 years their numbers in urban areas increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim communities in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima. Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the Andean highlands. Indigenous people in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely, although they do not receive the same privileges as the Catholic Church with respect to customs, immigration, and taxation.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Article 50 of the Constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy. Nonetheless, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and an agreement signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Critics complained that the agreement was unconstitutional because it was signed with a military government, not by democratic representatives. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high-profile role in the public sector.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion, but the Catholic Church receives preferential treatment in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas, in accordance with the agreement. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Buildings, houses, and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) may pay property taxes for schools and clergy residences. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Church. This applies to the country's 52 bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the borders. In addition each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial.

The executive branch formally interacts with religious communities on issues of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry implements laws and interacts with the public through the Office of Catholic Affairs and through the Office of Interconfessional Affairs, which deals with non-Catholic religions. Both offices maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups on religious freedom. Both offices exist primarily to process complaints of religious discrimination and to assist religious groups in relations with the state, such as exemptions from import taxes and customs duties.

In 2004 the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation to enhance religious freedom and equality by allowing non-Catholic churches to receive state benefits similar to the Catholic Church; however, some evangelical Christian churches complained that this new regulation required a church to operate 7 years before being recognized. In addition many evangelical churches lack central lines of authority and doctrinal unity, complicating the process of registration. More hierarchical and established church groups supported strict registration requirements.

As a result of negotiations between the Ministry of Justice and an interfaith working group of non-Catholic religious groups, regulations now permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to register churches. The registration does not recognize churches officially but identifies those Protestant churches eligible for assistance from the Office of Interconfessional Affairs. The interfaith working group continues to advocate a draft law to promote further religious freedom and equality. The legislation is currently awaiting revisions in the Ministry of Justice. Congressmen have proposed at least three other draft laws on religious freedom. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress had not taken action on the drafts.

All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. During the period covered by this report, a member of the Lima Bar Association filed a discrimination complaint to protest the presence of a crucifix in the main lobby of the group's building.

The law mandates 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." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry made it mandatory for the presiding Catholic bishop of an area to approve religious education teachers.

Parents who do not wish their public school children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. 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 for religious education; however, the parents must provide the teacher.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors strict separation of church and state and opposes

preferential treatment for any religious group, claimed that the financial subsidies and tax benefits given to the Catholic Church are far more extensive and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Ministry of Justice officials stated that the Catholic Cardinal of Peru is paid \$400 (PEN 1,260) per month, and six archbishops are given almost \$300 (PEN 900) per month; other Catholic Church officials receive lesser amounts.

Catholic charities do not pay customs duties. Non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complained that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Catholics and non-Catholics are subject to equal taxation in regard to many, but not all, other activities. Catholics are exempt from paying taxes on places of worship and other religious buildings, and Catholic officials are exempt from taxes on certain kinds of travel.

In 2006 religious groups and the Ministry of Justice worked together to change residency documents to differentiate between "religious" and "nonreligious" status, rather than between "Catholic" and "non-Catholic," as had been done previously. This reform helped to equalize the immigration process so that non-Catholics are not disadvantaged.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents are exempt from attending Catholic instruction, students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class, regardless of other academic achievements. These students are thus disadvantaged in competition for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion for military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating 40 Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as relatives and civilian coworkers, to participate in Catholic services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. Some non-Catholic soldiers, however, have complained that it is difficult to find and attend Protestant religious services because of the lack of Protestant chaplains.

Some non-Catholic missionary groups have claimed that the law discriminates against them by taxing religious materials they import, including Bibles, whereas the Catholic Church is not taxed on such items.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In early May 2007 the remains of evangelical pastor Jorge Parraga Castillo were found at the Manta military base. On October 25, 1989, the military had detained him and took him to the base. Witnesses claim that the military tortured and killed Pastor Parraga and then burned his body. The Ombudsman's office did not believe that Pastor Parraga's death was related to his work as a pastor. By the end of the reporting period, no one had been charged in the killing, although an investigation by the Public Ministry was continuing.

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

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

President Garcia recognized Protestantism's growing influence by attending a service organized by Lima evangelical churches during his 2006 inauguration festivities. His action sparked debate about the need to balance freedom of religion with the country's traditional identity as a Catholic nation. Masses were often celebrated at government-sponsored events including those taking place on government property; however, many new Congressmen broke with tradition by refusing to invoke either God or the Bible during swearing-in ceremonies.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Protestants gained high-level leadership positions in society. In 2005 two prominent evangelical pastors created the National Restoration (RN) party, which remained open to all religious groups. The party ran a candidate in the 2006 presidential elections who finished sixth and later ran a candidate in the Lima mayoral race who finished third. Three evangelical Protestants were elected to Congress. An evangelical Christian was elected president of Congress in August

2006.

Religious groups occasionally joined forces on ecumenical projects on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborated closely in the area of human rights. The Catholic Church utilized evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when no priest was available. The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, an evangelical NGO, have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason. Major political figures have promoted religious freedom in public affairs, and non-Catholic politicians have attained higher profiles.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, Protestant groups, and the Jewish community. The Embassy also continued regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

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