

BRAZIL 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including incidents involving anti-Semitism and intolerance toward members of Africa-based religious groups.

The U.S. embassy and consulates actively engaged with civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to facilitate interfaith dialogue and promote religious tolerance. Outreach efforts included meetings with religious leaders and participation in interfaith events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 201 million (July 2013 estimate). An estimated 64.6 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 22 percent is Protestant, according to the 2010 census. Approximately 60 percent of Protestants belong to Pentecostal churches, 18 percent belong to traditional Protestant churches, and 22 percent to other Protestant groups. Other Christian groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Other groups each constituting less than 1 percent of the population include African and syncretic religious groups such as Candomble and Umbanda, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. There are a small number of adherents of indigenous religious beliefs.

There are different assessments of the number of Muslims. According to the 2010 census, there are approximately 35,200 Muslims, while the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil considers the number to be about 1.5 million. Other observers estimate there are approximately 400,000-500,000 Muslims. There are significant Muslim communities in the cities of Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu, as well as in smaller cities in the states of Parana, Rio Grande do Sul, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

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According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil, there are more than 125,000 Jews, 65,000 of whom reside in Sao Paulo State and 40,000 in Rio de Janeiro State. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The law provides penalties of up to five years in prison for crimes of religious intolerance. Courts may fine or imprison for two to five years anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts religiously intolerant material. It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell literature that promotes religious intolerance, including anti-Semitism.

The law provides for the right to practice religions of African origin. By law members of religions of African origin must have access to religious professionals in hospitals, prisons, and other institutions.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups. Religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

Public schools are required to offer religious instruction, but neither the constitution nor legislation defines the parameters. Religious instruction is optional for students by law; however, in practice 49 percent of schools consider it a mandatory subject and approximately 80 percent do not offer alternatives or “opt out” options, according to a survey of school directors by QEDU, a nonprofit organization that provides information on education in Brazil. Each school defines the religious curriculum, usually in agreement with parent councils. The law prohibits public subsidies to schools operated by religious organizations.

Government Practices

On January 30, during an event in Brasilia in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Dilma Rousseff said, “The Holocaust is repeated when denied, relativized, or softened.” The event included government officials and officials from the Jewish community and honored two Brazilian diplomats who helped save hundreds of Jews from Nazi concentration camps.

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On March 18, the Bahia State Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality launched the Network to Combat Racism and Religious Intolerance, to create a center to provide assistance to victims of racism and religious intolerance.

In May the Committee on the Constitution and Justice of the municipality of Salvador unanimously rejected a bill proposed by Alderman Marcell Moraes (Green Party) to ban animal sacrifices in Candomble religious rituals. Media reported the decision was based on religious freedom concerns.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

In September Rio de Janeiro media reported that drug traffickers were persecuting adherents of Candomble and other Afro-Brazilian religions in impoverished Rio communities. The media reported that drug traffickers had forced Candomble areas to close, expelled at least 40 Candomble leaders from the communities, and forbid residents to wear white clothing or display other outward signs of being a Candomble practitioner.

According to media reports, some students who practiced Candomble and other Afro-Brazilian religions in schools were discriminated against by teachers or other students, including being told to repeat prayers or face expulsion and forced by school authorities to attend Catholic or evangelical classes.

Authorities arrested seven persons in May in Rio for targeting minority groups and espousing anti-Semitic sentiments. Six of those arrested were indicted and were awaiting trial at year's end, and the seventh was a minor remanded to shelter and later released. There were reports of additional anti-Semitic groups in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The media reported in June that a federal civil court in Sao Paulo found the Bandeirantes TV network guilty of discrimination against atheists when a show host and guest stated that the killing of a child could only have been done by atheists. Bandeirantes was required to issue a public apology and inform viewers about religious diversity and freedom of religion. Daniel Sottomaior, president of the Brazilian Association of Atheists and Agnostics, publicly stated that atheists

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continue to face prejudice and discrimination and that he had received anonymous death threats.

There were many efforts to promote interfaith dialogue, such as the Abraham's Path Initiative, an international NGO. Abraham's Path sponsored annual "friendship runs" that brought Jews, Christians, and Muslims together to increase interfaith understanding; more than 5,000 persons participated in Sao Paulo.

The Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance in Rio de Janeiro, in partnership with Rio de Janeiro State University, brought together diverse religious and nonreligious groups, including Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, spiritualists, and atheists. On September 8, the commission organized the 6th Annual Walk for the Defense of Religious Freedom held in Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. At the event, which approximately 2,000 attended, various leaders spoke about the importance of religious freedom.

The Catholic Church's Sao Paulo's House of Reconciliation hosted monthly meetings with the Jewish community as part of the commission's work to emphasize unity and reconciliation of differences among various Christian and Jewish religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with local religious leaders, continued to support the growing interfaith dialogue, and supported organizations involved in the interfaith movement, such as the Abraham's Path Initiative. Consulate General Sao Paulo representatives participated in the October interfaith "Walk for Peace" organized by the Abraham's Path Initiative.

On July 22, Consulate General Rio de Janeiro hosted an interfaith reception for U.S. Catholic bishops visiting Rio in conjunction with World Youth Day, a global gathering organized by the Roman Catholic Church. Persons invited included representatives from the Catholic Church, pastors from evangelical Christian churches, a rabbi, the president of the Israeli Federation, and the president of the Muslim Society. Approximately 40 religious leaders attended the event, which was intended to welcome the Catholic bishops and to provide religious leaders of different faiths with the opportunity to converse in an informal setting.

In July the Sao Paulo Consulate General hosted an iftar for members of the Muslim and interfaith communities, which received media coverage in the local magazine

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Chams. In a multimedia presentation during the event, the Consul General spoke about religious tolerance in the United States, drawing particularly on examples of Muslim life in America.