



Dominican Republic

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, which occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population of 9.2 million. The largest religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to a population survey taken in 2006 by the Gallup Organization, the population is 39.8 percent Catholic (practicing), 29.1 percent Catholic (nonpracticing), and 18.2 percent evangelical Protestant. In the same study, 10.6 percent state they have no religion. The Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity (CODUE) assert that evangelicals represent 16 to 20 percent of the population.

There are approximately 300 Jews, of whom very few are observant. Most live in Santo Domingo, which has a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. There is a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua. Both synagogues were led by the same individual.

Various government sources estimate that there are between 5,000 and 10,000 Muslims, a figure that includes many foreign students. There is an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 300 regular worshippers. There is a small number of Buddhists and Hindus. Many Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería), witchcraft (brujería), or voodoo (vodou), but because these practices are usually concealed, the number of adherents is unknown.

There are organized missionary groups in the country.

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. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution specifies that there is no state religion. The Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, making Catholicism the official religion and extending to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious groups. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and exoneration from all customs duties. The Cardinal has the rank of a military general officer, and there

is a Catholic chapel at the presidential palace.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exonerations from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exonation were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders regularly urged the Government to provide their churches privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church. Catholic weddings are the only religious wedding ceremonies that the Government recognizes.

On July 11, 2006, the Ministerio Jesús es Sanidad y Vida Eterna (Jesus is Health and Life Eternal Ministries), an evangelical Christian organization, challenged the constitutionality of the concordat in place between the state and the Vatican before the Supreme Court of Justice. Twelve days later the Supreme Court solicited an advisory opinion from the Office of the Attorney General on the case, to which the Office of the Attorney General responded in August 2006 with a recommendation that the constitutional challenge be denied. At the end of the reporting period, the Supreme Court had not taken further action.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but the law was not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading among their activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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

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. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority groups.

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