

ECUADOR 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution grants individuals the right to choose, practice, and change religions, and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The government required religious groups to register with the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, and Cults. Religious leaders stated municipal governments helped them to navigate the bureaucratic procedures necessary to maintain places of worship.

There were reports of societal discrimination. Incidents included verbal insults against individuals in religious attire and anti-Semitic graffiti on public buildings.

U.S. embassy and consulate officials discussed the status of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity with government officials and representatives of religious communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 15.7 million (July 2014 estimate). According to a 2012 survey by the Ecuadorian National Institute of Statistics and Census, approximately 92 percent of the population professes a religious affiliation or belief. Of those, 80.4 percent is Roman Catholic; 11.3 percent evangelical Christian, including Pentecostals; 1.3 percent Jehovah's Witnesses; and 7 percent belongs to other religious groups including Islam, Hinduism, and indigenous and African faiths. Smaller religious groups include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Buddhists, Jews, spiritualists, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Bahais, Lutherans, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Presbyterians, members of the Unification Church, and followers of Inti (the traditional Inca sun god).

Some groups, particularly those in the Amazonian jungle and Choco regions, combine indigenous beliefs with Catholicism. Pentecostals draw much of their membership from indigenous people in the highland provinces. Many evangelical churches are not affiliated with a particular denomination. These groups include Avant Ministries, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of the Evangelical Pact, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice (Today Christ Jesus Blesses). There are also practitioners of Santeria, primarily resident Cubans.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

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Legal Framework

The constitution grants all individuals the right to practice and profess publicly and freely the religion of their choice, and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It states the government has a responsibility to “protect voluntary religious practice, as well as the expression of those who do not profess any religion, and will favor an atmosphere of plurality and tolerance.” Individuals have the right to change their religion.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, and Cults. Registration in the Register of Religious Entities provides the religious group with legal and nonprofit status. To register, a religious group must possess a charter, include in its application all names used by the group to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission, and provide signatures of at least 15 members, typically leaders of the organization. All nonprofit organizations, including more than 2,200 registered religious groups, must report on the expenditure of any government funding received.

Under the law, public schools are prohibited from providing religious instruction. Private schools may provide religious instruction. There are no legal restrictions or regulations on which religious groups may establish a school.

Government Practices

Religious representatives stated the government imposed a standard academic calendar that applied to private and public schools, which made it more difficult for some schools to observe certain religious holidays.

Religious leaders stated municipal governments helped them navigate the bureaucratic procedures to obtain land titles, building permits, and other documents necessary to maintain places of worship. During the year, the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Cults led training sessions for religious organizations – particularly evangelical Christian groups – providing instruction on public policies promoting religious freedom and helped new groups obtain legal status.

The government held seminars that brought together leaders of different religious groups to promote dialogue on religious freedom and tolerance.

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Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Government officials stated there were no cases of religious violence during the year, but instances of societal discrimination occurred. In mid-August, anti-Semitic graffiti featuring a Star of David and a swastika equating a Jewish-owned supermarket chain with Nazis appeared in public spaces in Quito. Government officials also registered complaints of verbal insults against members of the Catholic clergy and Catholic and Muslim individuals wearing religious or traditional attire. There were no reported arrests in these cases.

Religious leaders stated there were good relations among different religious groups. There were limited interreligious cooperation efforts, such as the participation of religious leaders in each other's principal celebrations. Religious representatives stated there were no formal mechanisms to promote interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives discussed the status of religious freedom during formal meetings with government officials and local authorities. Embassy and consulate officials discussed religious freedom and respect for religious diversity and tolerance with Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, and evangelical Christian leaders.