

# **BRAZIL**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government 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, including incidents involving anti-Semitism and intolerance towards followers of African-based religions. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom, and numerous efforts promoted interfaith understanding among Christians, Muslims, Jews, and followers of other religions.

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

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic (about 125 million persons). Fifteen percent were Protestant, of which an estimated 74 percent were from evangelical churches. There were 1,104,886 Jehovah's Witnesses and 199,645 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Members of African and syncretic religious groups totaled 127,582 adherents of Candomble and 397,431 followers of Umbanda. There were also 214,873 Buddhists, 86,825 Jews, 27,239 Muslims, 2,905 Hindus, 151,080 adherents of other eastern religions, and 17,088 adherents of indigenous religious beliefs.

While the 2000 census reported 27,239 Muslims, the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil estimated in 2010 that there were 1.5 million Muslims in the country. 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 protect religious freedom. Article 5 of the constitution provides for freedom of religion.

The law provides penalties of up to five years in prison for crimes of religious intolerance and enables courts to 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 Racial Equality Act provides for the right to practice religions of African origin. Additionally, members of religions of African origin are granted 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. Each school defines the religious curriculum, usually in agreement with parent councils. The law prohibits public subsidies to schools operated by religious organizations.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen, Assumption, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

#### **Government Practices**

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There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

### **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.

According to the NGO Jewish Federation, on March 12 a man verbally threatened and physically assaulted a Jewish man walking in the Jardins neighborhood of Sao Paulo.

In February, the Israeli Federation of Rio de Janeiro filed a criminal complaint against a man who used the Nazi salute and exhibited his swastika tattoo for photos during an event held at the Brazilian Israeli Club in Rio de Janeiro in December, 2010. The offender was arrested and released, and the case was still pending trial at year's end.

Other incidents of anti-Semitism included graffiti, other acts of vandalism, harassment, and threats via telephone and e-mail, as reported by the Secretariat of Human Rights and the NGO Safernet. Safernet also reported that approximately 300 neo-Nazi cells, 90 percent of them in the states of Sao Paulo, Santa Catarina, Parana, and Rio Grande do Sul, operated within the country. Safernet estimated that each cell could consist of up to approximately 40 individuals.

Anti-Semitic websites continued to operate. Small groups of skinheads, neo-Nazis, and white supremacists operated on the political fringes in Parana, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Sao Paulo states, committing harassment toward Jews and other minority groups. Law enforcement agents continued to monitor these groups. In May a store in Sao Paulo was found selling dolls depicting Nazi figures, but halted sales after complaints by the Jewish Federation.

The Office to Combat Religious Intolerance in the state of Rio de Janeiro received numerous complaints of intolerance; most came from followers of African-based groups, such as Candomble and Umbanda.

On April 25, retired Rio de Janeiro civil police chief Raul Oliveira Dias Alves, arrested in May 2010 for ridiculing the religious garb of a Muslim woman, was

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sentenced to two years' community service for violating laws protecting religious freedom.

There was no formal national interfaith movement; however, there were many interfaith efforts throughout the country, such as the Abraham's Path Initiative, an international interfaith NGO endorsed by the UN. Abraham's Path sponsored annual "friendship runs" that brought Jews, Christians, and Muslims together in an effort to increase understanding; over 3,000 persons participated in the 2011 run in Sao Paulo.

The Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance in Rio de Janeiro brought together diverse religious and nonreligious groups, including Muslims, Jews, Christians, Spiritualists, and atheists. The commission organized an annual Walk Against Religious Intolerance held in Rio. The walk had more than 180,000 participants in 2011.

The National Commission for Religious Dialogue, created in 1981 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, continued to bring together Christian and Jewish groups. Sao Paulo's House of Reconciliation, also created by the Catholic Church in 1981, hosted monthly meetings with the Jewish community as part of the commission's work. In 2011 the House of Reconciliation began seeking the inclusion of other religions, such as Islam, in its meetings.

Ecumenical movements and organizations such as the National Council of Christian Churches continued to bring together Catholics and Protestants. The Group of Ecumenical Reflection and Interreligious Dialogue also promoted ecumenical dialogue between different church denominations at the national and regional levels.

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

U.S. embassy officials met with many 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.

In March the Sao Paulo consul general met with Sao Paulo Jewish community leaders to discuss educational and outreach opportunities to address issues of religious toleration. In April consulate officers met with Sao Paulo Jewish community leaders during the annual Passover celebration. The scope of the event was expanded to facilitate interfaith dialogue and promote cross-cultural

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understanding. In July the consul general and staff members in Sao Paulo participated in the third annual interfaith “Walk for Friendship,” which passed a synagogue, mosque, and church and involved approximately 3,000 persons of different religious groups. In August the ambassador hosted an iftar dinner in Sao Paulo, bringing together members of the Muslim and interfaith communities. In October a consular official discussed religious freedom and other issues in Foz de Iguacu with Muslim community leaders.