

HONDURAS

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally 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. Some religious organizations alleged government discrimination regarding recognition of religious organizations and visa requests for missionaries.

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

U.S. embassy officers regularly met with leaders of various religious organizations and discussed concerns of the religious community with the government as part of the embassy's overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup, a Latin American market research and public opinion company, reported 47 percent of respondents identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 36 percent as evangelical Protestant. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The Evangelical Confederation of Honduras represents the evangelical leadership. There are approximately 2,000 Muslims and 1,000 Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

In October 2010 the National Congress passed a law recognizing the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as a legally recognized church, making it the second officially recognized church in the country, alongside the Catholic Church. Other government-recognized religious organizations were classified as religious associations but not as churches and did not have the rights and privileges of churches, such as state recognition of weddings performed by the member churches of the confederation and tax exemption for the salaries of church officials. By law only the legislature has the authority to confer the status of a legally recognized church. The constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, which provides for tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group from the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras for review. This group may suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the Office of the Solicitor General for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. Applications require presidential signature. The government does not require religious groups to register.

The constitution stipulates only laypersons may seek election to Congress.

The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population.

The Law of Social Harmony prohibits the immigration of foreign missionaries who practiced religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practiced witchcraft or "religious fraud."

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. Each military base commander selected either a Catholic or a Protestant chaplain. The chaplains were not military career chaplains but were entitled to a stipend and a military uniform for the duration of their military chaplaincy. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions.

While the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population generally granted entry and residence permits to foreign missionaries, religious organizations reported the secretariat has not granted such permits to missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Church of the Living God, Pillar and Support of Truth and Light of the World launched a constitutional challenge with the Supreme Court of Justice in November 2010 against an October 2010 law recognizing the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as a legally recognized church, arguing the law was unconstitutional because it excluded churches and religions that were not members of the confederation. The Supreme Court did not render a decision by year's end.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

The Catholic archbishop of Tegucigalpa actively promoted ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The Inter-Ecclesiastic Forum, which was composed mainly of Protestant denominations but also included members of non-Christian religious groups such as Muslims, actively organized religious groups, including non-Christian groups, to discuss a wide range of issues, including freedom of assembly and religious parity under the law, as well as interreligious dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders from the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, non-Christian religious groups, church-sponsored universities, and other religious organizations. Among topics discussed were issues relating to the state of religious freedom and parity under the law. Embassy officials maintained an open dialogue with government officials in discussing the same issues.