

# **CANADA 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. The government established an Office of Religious Freedom headed by an official of ambassadorial rank. This office was designed to promote religious freedom and oppose intolerance around the world.

There were reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including both anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim acts.

The U.S. embassy and consulates supported religious freedom through visits to places of worship and outreach to religious groups.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 34.6 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2011 census, the most recent to ask about religious affiliation, approximately 67 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics (39 percent of the population) constitute the largest group, followed by Protestant denominations (22 percent). The United, the Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches are the largest Protestant groups. Approximately 3 percent of the population is Muslim and 1 percent is Jewish. Groups that together constitute less than 4 percent of the population include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Scientologists, Bahais, and adherents of Shintoism and Taoism.

According to the 2011 census, 0.2 percent of the population identifies itself as followers of “aboriginal spirituality.” Approximately 24 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation.

Most recent immigrants are of Asian origin and generally adhere to religious beliefs different from the majority of native-born citizens. According to the 2011 census, “visible minorities” constitute 19.1 percent of the overall population, with a majority residing in major metropolitan areas across the country.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

## CANADA

### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The government requires candidates for Canadian citizenship to uncover the face when swearing the oath of citizenship to verify that each candidate recites the oath.

The law does not require religious groups to register with the government. The government grants tax-exempt status to religious groups through the Charities Directorate of the tax authority, the Canada Revenue Agency. This status provides religious groups with federal and provincial sales tax reductions, rebates, and exemptions. To gain and retain tax-exempt status, these groups must be nonpolitical, send overseas donations only to approved recipients, and undergo periodic audits. Through this same government-approved charitable status, clergy receive various federal benefits, including a clergy housing deduction under the tax code and expedited processing through the immigration system. Individual citizens who donate to tax-exempt religious groups receive a federal tax receipt entitling them to federal income tax deductions.

The constitution guarantees the rights and privileges that existed at the time of national union in 1867 of Protestant and Catholic minorities to denominational education. Constitutionally protected public funding for denominational schools exists only for members of the Catholic Church in Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The same protection does not extend to schools of other religious groups, although some provinces provide limited public funding for these institutions. The law permits parents to home-school their children and to enroll them in private schools for religious reasons. Education falls under the purview of the provinces, not the federal government. Six of the 10 provinces provide at least partial funding to some religious schools.

Ontario is the only province that funds Catholic religious education while providing no funding for other religious schools. The issue of extending public funding to non-Catholic religious schools in the province has been the subject of litigation since 1978.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

## CANADA

### Government Practices

Issues involving the exercise of religious freedom at the federal and provincial levels included limits on religious expression.

In April an Ontario judge ruled that a female Muslim complainant had to remove her religious face covering to testify during a sexual assault trial. In 2012, the Supreme Court had ruled that presiding trial judges should determine whether individuals could wear religious face coverings while testifying in court on a case-by-case basis. The complainant appealed the trial judge's decision that she should remove her face covering, and the appeal remained pending at the end of the year.

On February 19, the government established an Office of Religious Freedom within the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development headed by an official of ambassadorial rank to protect and advocate on behalf of religious minorities under threat around the world, to oppose religious hatred and intolerance, and promote pluralism and tolerance abroad.

On March 5, Canada assumed the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and hosted the Alliance's annual conference in October in Toronto. The conference approved a working definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion as a public education and awareness tool. Events throughout the year in support of Holocaust education and remembrance included a national project to preserve survivor testimony, an Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education to recognize outstanding teachers, and a poster competition for Canadian graphics, art, and design students to support Holocaust Memorial Day activities.

On April 23, the government announced the selection of a site in Ottawa for a National Holocaust Monument. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism attended the National Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony hosted by the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem and the Zachor Coalition and lit candles in memory of victims.

In May the Quebec Court of Appeal ruled that the mayor of Saguenay, Quebec, could continue to begin council meetings with a prayer and retain a crucifix and Christian religious statue at city hall. A citizen had challenged the official prayer and the religious symbols as an infringement on freedom of conscience. The court ruled that religious neutrality does not require "that society be cleansed of all denominational reality" and that the act of prayer by individual councilors, and the retention of the religious symbols as cultural artifacts, did not indicate that the

## CANADA

municipal council was under the influence of, or trying to impose, a particular religion.

On February 27, the Supreme Court ruled that restrictions imposed by Saskatchewan's hate speech law constituted reasonable limits on freedom of expression and freedom of religion to prevent harm to minority groups. The decision was part of a 2011 appeal regarding a citizen who had handed out fliers denouncing homosexuality on religious grounds.

On September 13, the Manitoba government enacted an anti-bullying law requiring public and private schools in the province to establish diversity policies and accommodate student activities that promote inclusion, including permitting gay-straight alliances (student-led organizations that promote inclusion among persons of all sexual orientations). Some faith-based schools and parents stated that the law infringed on their freedom to prohibit student activities that contradicted their religious beliefs.

On August 21, Agnes Maltais, the Quebec minister responsible for the status of women, wrote to her federal counterpart stating that some speakers at an upcoming Muslim youth conference in Montreal “convey values that are totally contrary to the principles of gender equality that are defended in Quebec.” The letter referenced a 2011 Quebec National Assembly motion requesting that Canada refuse entry to speakers at a similar event. In her letter, the minister requested that “in accordance with the [2011] National Assembly motion and as the Minister responsible for the status of women in Quebec, I ask you to take all necessary measures to prevent the spreading of these unacceptable messages to the women in Quebec.”

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were reports of societal abuse and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

On September 2, vandals splattered a mosque in Chicoutimi, Quebec, with a substance that media reports identified as pig blood. An anonymous anti-Islamic letter was also sent to the mosque and to a local radio station. Quebec Premier Pauline Marois denounced the vandalism as “unacceptable” and emphasized that

## CANADA

Quebec respected diversity. Police investigated, but by year's end, had made no arrests.

On March 6, vandals spray painted anti-Islamic graffiti on the wall of the Muslim Society of Guelph's Islamic Center in Guelph, Ontario. Police investigated, but made no arrests. The Muslim Society responded with a community event held one month later, with more than 300 attendees.

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 1,345 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2012, the most recent year for which data was available, up 3.7 percent from 2011. More than half of such reports came from Ontario. The reports included 1,013 cases of harassment, 319 cases of vandalism, and 13 cases of violence. There were 25 cases involving attacks on synagogues, 144 involving private homes, and 25 involving community centers. Jewish students reported 79 cases of anti-Semitic incidents on university campuses, compared with 113 in 2011; another 79 involved primary and secondary school settings, compared with 89 in 2010. B'nai Brith also received 521 reports of Web-based hate activity, compared with 528 in 2011.

In May a Manitoba teenager pleaded guilty to setting the hair of a Jewish classmate alight while uttering anti-Semitic slurs in 2011. The judge delayed sentencing in June subject to a forensic psychiatrist's report that remained pending at the end of the year.

In June assailants scrawled a swastika and the message "watch your children" on the garage door of the home of a Jewish family in Toronto. Toronto Police arrested an adult and two teenagers and charged them with multiple counts of attempted theft, property offenses and mischief in connection with a series of incidents in the area.

On August 21, vandals defaced four homes and several parked cars in Vaughan, Ontario, with swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti. The community has a large Jewish population. York Regional Police investigated. Also in August vandals carved a swastika into a golf green at a golf club in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

In March two Jewish brothers filed suit for libel to stop the distribution of anti-Semitic posters in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The posters, titled "\$hitlers List," primarily targeted the Jewish mayor of Winnipeg and accused prominent Jews in the city of being part of a "cabal of cockroaches." The suit also alleged the brothers were victims of hate speech. The provincial attorney general's office

## CANADA

declined to bring charges against the distributor of the posters because the materials did not explicitly promote genocide.

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

U.S. government representatives collaborated with the government to promote religious freedom. The U.S. embassy and consulates conducted regular outreach to religious leaders, NGOs, and religious groups.

On April 8, the U.S. Ambassador visited and spoke at the Ottawa Mosque, the city's largest mosque, on respect for religious freedom and building bridges between religious communities. Together with embassy staff, he also greeted local imams, community leaders, and members of the mosque at a reception following the event.

In October embassy officials attended the 5th annual All-Party Interfaith Parliamentary Friendship Group Breakfast and participated in a roundtable discussion afterwards on best practices for promoting the freedom of religion within the country.

On August 16, embassy representatives attended a Friday service and congregational prayer at a *musalla* (an area outside a mosque that is used mainly for praying) in east Ottawa, and greeted congregants at a lunch following the service.

Staff of the embassy and consulates attended community iftar and Eid dinners. On July 31, consulate representatives in Montreal attended an interfaith iftar dinner sponsored by L'Institut du Dialogue Interculturel with leaders of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities. On October 22, embassy representatives attended the 19th annual Eid-ul-Adha Dinner, organized by the Association of Progressive Muslims of Canada. Local Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders, as well as government officials, attended the dinner.

On April 23, an embassy official attended a National Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony in Ottawa. The Canadian Society hosted this ceremony for Yad Vashem and the Zachor Coalition to commemorate victims of the Holocaust.

In October embassy officials attended the inaugural seminar of the Canadian Office of Religious Freedom with leaders of faith communities.