

ECUADOR 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.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, particularly against Muslim and Jewish communities.

U.S. embassy and consulate officials discussed religious freedom with leaders of a broad spectrum of religious groups and promoted religious tolerance and diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 15.4 million (July 2013 estimate). A 2012 survey by the Ecuadorian National Institute of Statistics and Census indicates 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 11 percent is evangelical Christian, and 6 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), Jehovah's Witnesses, 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 combine indigenous beliefs with Catholicism. Pentecostals draw much of their membership from indigenous people in the highland provinces. Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, many of which are not affiliated with a particular denomination. These groups include Avant Ministries, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice (Today Jesus Christ Blesses). There are also practitioners of Santeria, primarily resident Cubans.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

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The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Interior. To register, a religious group must possess a charter, have nonprofit status, 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.

Government Practices

Some leaders in the Catholic Church stated that increased government financial reporting regulations have restricted their ability to accept foreign support, which negatively impacted their capacity to provide certain social services.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Muslim and Jewish leaders reported that members of their communities faced intolerance in the streets, discrimination when applying for work or housing, or among children at school. The Muslim community responded by disseminating informational pamphlets explaining Islamic practices and traditions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with leaders of a broad spectrum of religious groups. U.S. embassy and consulate officials discussed the status of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity with Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and evangelical Protestant leaders, and met with religiously-affiliated NGOs. Embassy representatives also discussed with prisoners their ability to practice their religion while incarcerated.