

# **PORTUGAL 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution protects the freedom of religion and worship and prohibits religious persecution and discrimination. The government's High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI) sponsored events and activities to promote religious tolerance and acceptance, published diverse religious texts, and organized education for teachers and workers who interact with people of diverse religious backgrounds.

As part of the Week of Christian Unity celebrations, Christian denominations signed a document for the mutual recognition of the sacrament of baptism as administered in different churches.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met with leaders of the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities, to promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue. The embassy worked with local foundations to promote Holocaust education.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.8 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2011 census, more than 80 percent of the population above the age of 15 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church. Other religious groups, each constituting less than 5 percent of the population, include Orthodox Christians, various Protestant and other Christian denominations, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. The Protestant population includes 250,000 members of evangelical churches. The 2011 census estimated there are 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine, most of whom are Eastern Orthodox. More than 600,000 people do not claim membership in any religious group.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides for the freedom of religion and worship. It states that no one shall be "persecuted, deprived of rights or exempted from civic obligations or duties" because of religious beliefs or practices. The constitution states individuals

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may not be questioned by authorities about religious convictions or observance, with the exception of gathering statistical information that does not identify individuals, and in such cases individuals may not be prejudiced by refusal to reply. The constitution states churches and religious communities are independent from the state, with the freedom to determine their own organization and to perform their own ceremonies and worship. The constitution further affords each religious community the freedom to teach its religion and to use its own media to disseminate public information about its activities. The constitution and the law guarantee the right to be a conscientious objector.

Religious groups may be organized in a variety of forms that may have national, regional, or local character. A denomination may choose to organize as one national church or religious community or as several regional or local churches or religious communities. An international church or religious community may set up a representative organization of its adherents that may be separate from the branch of the church or religious community existing in the country. A registered church or religious community may create subsidiary or affiliated organizations, such as associations, foundations, or federations.

All religious groups with an organized presence in the country may apply for registration with the registrar of religious corporate bodies in the Ministry of Justice. The procedures for registering are the same for all religious groups. The requirements include: the organization's official name, which must be distinguishable from all other religious corporate bodies in the country; the organizing documents of the church or religious community associated with the group applying for registration; the address of the organization's registered main office inside the country; a statement of the group's religious purposes; documentation of the organization's assets; information on the organization's formation, composition, rules, and activities; provisions for dissolution of the organization; and the appointment method and powers of the organization's representatives. To obtain the higher status of a "religion settled in the country" a group must be established in the country for at least 30 years. How subsidiary or affiliated organizations of registered religious corporations are registered depends on the registration of the churches or religious communities that originated them.

All registered religious groups are considered to be "religious corporations" and receive tax-exempt status; the right to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; the right to provide religious teaching in public schools; the right to participate in broadcasting time on public television and radio; and national

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recognition of religious holidays. The government certifies religious ministers who receive all the benefits of the social security system. Chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are state-funded positions open to all registered religious groups. A taxpayer may allocate a portion of his or her tax payment to any registered religious group.

By law, registered religious groups settled in the country for at least 30 years, or internationally recognized for 60 years, may receive government subsidies, conclude “mutual interest” agreements with the state on issues such as education, culture, or other forms of cooperation, and may celebrate religious marriages that have effect in the state legal system. The government currently has these agreements with Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic religious bodies.

Religious groups may also register as unincorporated associations or private corporations, and in that form may receive the same benefits granted to religious corporations.

Religious groups that do not register in any form do not enjoy the benefits associated with registration, but may practice their religion.

The Catholic Church maintains a “mutual interest” agreement with the government under the terms of a 1940 concordat with the Holy See, as amended in 2004, to comply with subsequent legislation. The concordat recognizes the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference and allows the Catholic Church to receive the income tax voluntarily allocated to it by taxpayers in their annual tax returns.

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals on the basis of religion and requires reasonable accommodation of employees’ religious practices. Employees are allowed to take leave on their Sabbath and religious holidays, even if these are not nationally observed holidays.

Public secondary schools offer an optional survey course on world religions taught by lay teachers. Religious groups may offer optional religious instruction in schools provided the course is taught by lay teachers and 10 or more students of the faith attend the class. Religious group representatives have the right to approve the course’s instructors. All schools, public and private, are required to accommodate the religious practices of students, including rescheduling tests if necessary.

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The law provides for the naturalization of Jewish descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Portugal in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The Commission for Religious Freedom (CLR), established by law, is an independent, consultative body to the parliament and government. It reviews and takes a position on all matters relating to the application of the law on religious freedom, including proposed amendments. It alerts the competent authorities, such as the president, parliament, and the government, to cases involving religious freedom and discrimination, such as restrictions or prohibitions on the right to assembly and the holding of religious services; the destruction or desecration of religious property; assaults against members and clergy of religious groups; incitement of religious discord; and violations of the rights of foreign missionaries. The CLR may file formal complaints at the national level with the “Portuguese Ombudsman”, an official position created by the constitution and supplemental legislation to defend the rights and freedoms of individual citizens, and at the international level with the European Court of Human Rights.

### **Government Practices**

The state-run television channel continued to air segments written by different registered religious groups five days a week, as well as weekly 30-minute programs highlighting activities of various religious groups. Delegates selected by the religious groups participated in a special television commission to determine the scheduling of segments.

The ACIDI hosted events, activities, and debates on a regular basis to promote religious tolerance and acceptance. ACIDI organized courses on intercultural and religious relations designed for teachers and workers who have contact with people of diverse religious backgrounds. It published literature and documents of various religions as well as its own texts on various religions to promote knowledge and mutual understanding.

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

On January 25, the Lusitanian Church Cathedral of St. Paul (Anglican) in Lisbon hosted a ceremony marking the mutual recognition of baptism among Christian faith traditions. The ceremony was attended by representatives and adherents of the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church of the

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Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church. The signing of a declaration of mutual recognition of the sacrament of baptism administered in the churches was part of the Week of Christian Unity celebrations.

In September the government-owned airline, TAP Portugal, named its newest aircraft in honor of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who saved approximately 30,000 Jews from the Holocaust by issuing them visas while serving as consul in France in 1940. The government stated this tribute symbolized a universal call for religious tolerance and human dignity.

In October the state university, Universidade do Minho, organized a debate entitled “A Future for Religions,” which discussed the importance of science and religion for social prosperity and the future of religions in Europe. Among the guest speakers were representatives from the Catholic Church and the Jewish community.

A Religious Freedom Observatory was launched in November by Lusofona University, to track religious freedom developments in the country.

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

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives continued to meet with leaders of religious groups, including the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities, to discuss potential cooperation between these communities and the embassy. Embassy officials engaged regularly with such religious leaders as the imam of the Lisbon Mosque and Nazim Ahmad, the head of the Ismaili Muslim Community and a member of the CLR, to promote tolerance and religious freedom.

The embassy, together with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Luso-American Development Foundation, continued to promote Holocaust education, with a focus on human rights and religious tolerance. On several occasions, an embassy representative spoke to school groups on Holocaust awareness, emphasizing religious acceptance.

The embassy disseminated information to promote religious tolerance and coexistence and interfaith dialogue through its social media accounts.