

HONDURAS 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, however, continued to legally recognize only the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Association of Honduras as churches. The government classified other religious groups as religious associations or non-governmental organizations, with fewer rights and privileges than the two recognized churches.

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 religious groups and discussed their concerns with the government as part of the embassy's overall policy to support religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.4 million (July 2013 estimate). There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. A 2007 survey by a Latin American market research and public opinion company reports 47 percent of respondents identify 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 evangelical Protestant. 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.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The constitution stipulates only laypersons may seek election to congress.

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By law only the legislature has the authority to confer the status of a legally recognized church. The constitution authorizes the executive branch to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious associations, which provides for tax exemptions and customs duty waivers. The government does not require religious groups to register.

Associations seeking juridical personality must submit an application to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population (SSIP), describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. The secretariat refers the applications of evangelical churches to a group from the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras for review. This group may suggest but not require changes. The office of the solicitor general must review all applications from religious groups and render a constitutional opinion. Applications also require presidential signature.

A 2010 law that granted official recognition to a limited confederation of religious groups remains in effect, despite a 2012 Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) decision finding it unconstitutional for violating the constitutional protection of freedom of religion. The law will not be officially repealed until the CSJ decision is published in the official register, which requires an act of 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 SSIP.

The law prohibits the immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals, and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or "religious fraud."

Government Practices

The legislature continued to recognize only the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as legally recognized churches. The government continued to classify government-recognized religious groups other than the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Confederation as religious associations or non-governmental organizations without the rights and privileges given to churches, such as tax exemption for clergy salaries and state recognition of religious marriages.

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In February the Secretary of Education issued a “Civic Saturdays” executive order requiring public and private schools to hold classes a certain number of Saturdays. Members of the Seventh day Adventist Church stated that the requirement to work and/or attend classes on Saturdays infringed upon their freedom of religion.

The Public Ministry charged one evangelical pastor under hate speech amendments to the penal code passed in February. The pastor made remarks against the LGBT community that were publicly disseminated. The court dismissed the case, but the Public Ministry appealed the dismissal. Evangelical leaders called the law and the prosecution an attack on religious freedom.

The armed forces had 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. Members of prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions.

While the SSIP granted entry and residence permits to foreign missionaries, religious groups reported the secretariat did not grant such permits to Mormon and Seventh-day Adventist missionaries. Mormons and Seventh-day Adventist missionaries were able to carry out their planned activities, but the lack of residence permits required them to renew their temporary visas more often.

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. However, graffiti swastikas were visible in some areas of Tegucigalpa.

The Catholic Archbishop of Tegucigalpa actively promoted ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The Inter-ecclesiastic Forum, composed mainly of Protestant denominations but also including members of non-Christian religious groups such as Muslims, actively organized interfaith discussions of a wide range of issues, including freedom of assembly, interreligious dialogue, and religious parity under the law.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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U.S. embassy officials maintained an open dialogue with government officials regarding religious freedom issues. Embassy representatives also maintained dialogue with religious leaders from the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, non-Christian religious groups, church-sponsored universities, and other religious organizations to support religious tolerance.