

# PERU 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution bars discrimination based on religious affiliation or belief and provides for freedom of conscience and religion, either individually or in association with others. It provides for the separation of religion and state but also recognizes the historic importance of the Roman Catholic Church. In July the government removed the requirement that religious entities seeking to register must have at least 500 adult members, allowing any group to register voluntarily regardless of its size or categorization. According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and interfaith groups in the country, the changes in the registration regulations encouraged more minority religious groups to register with the MOJ's Directorate of Justice and Religious Freedom. Small non-Catholic groups said they were pleased with the removal of the registration prerequisite to receive certain tax and visa benefits and other government services. Some Catholic Church members and members of religious minorities continued to criticize aspects of the 2011 religious freedom law, stating it maintained institutional preferences for the Catholic Church, particularly regarding tax exemptions.

Jewish community leaders said some individuals continued to engage occasionally in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about Jews and Israel. They said the government and both private and government-run media did not engage in this activity. Both Jewish and Muslim leaders said some public and private schools and employers occasionally did not give their members leave for religious holidays. The Interreligious Council of Peru continued to engage the MOJ for equal access to government benefits for all religious groups, including taxation exemptions on income, imports, property, and sales; visas for religious workers; and the opportunity to serve as military chaplains. The council continued to discuss the government's revisions of its religious freedom regulations with religious communities. Religious groups and interfaith organizations coordinated with the government, civil society, and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to more than 600,000 displaced Venezuelans in the country during the year, regardless of religious affiliation, with no reported efforts to proselytize, and to promote religious tolerance.

U.S. embassy officials discussed the 2011 religious freedom law and its 2016 implementing regulations with government representatives, emphasized the importance of equal treatment of all religious groups under the law, and discussed how religious groups were assisting the humanitarian response to the influx of

Venezuelans regardless of their religious affiliation or nonaffiliation. Embassy officials also engaged leaders from the Catholic, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), evangelical Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities to promote tolerance and respect for religious diversity.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31.3 million (July 2018). The 2017 national census reported the population as 76 percent Catholic (81 percent in 2007); 14 percent Protestant (mainly evangelical Protestant compared with 13 percent in 2007); 5.1 percent nonreligious; and 4.9 percent other religious groups. The other religious groups include Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ, Israelites of the New Universal Pact, Baha'is, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians (primarily Russian and Greek), and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

According to the Israel Information Center for Latin America, approximately 3,000 Jews reside in the country, primarily in Lima, Cusco, and Iquitos. According to the Muslim community, approximately 2,600 Muslims live in the country, with 2,000 in Lima and 600 in the Tacna region. Lima's Muslim community is approximately half-Arab in origin and half local converts, while Tacna's is mostly Pakistani. The majority of Muslims are Sunni.

Some indigenous peoples in the far eastern Amazonian jungles practice traditional faiths. Many indigenous communities, particularly Catholics in the Andean highlands, practice a syncretic faith blending Christian and pre-Columbian beliefs.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

The constitution bars discrimination and persecution based on religious affiliation or belief and provides for freedom of religion, either individually or in association with others. It states every person has the right to privacy of religious conviction. It establishes the separation of religion and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development" of the country.

A 1980 concordat between the government and the Holy See accords the Catholic Church certain institutional privileges in education, taxation, and immigration of

religious workers. The subsequent 2011 religious freedom law exempts Catholic Church buildings, houses, and other real estate holdings from property taxes. Other religious groups often must pay property taxes on their schools and clerical residences, depending on the municipal jurisdiction and whether the group seeks and/or receives tax-exempt status as a nonprofit organization. The law exempts Catholic religious workers from taxes on international travel. The government also exempts all work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops from income taxes. By law, the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains.

The MOJ is responsible for engaging with religious groups.

The 2016 revised implementing regulations to the religious freedom law make registration with the MOJ's Directorate of Justice and Religious Freedom optional and voluntary. The stated purpose of the registry is to promote integrity and facilitate a relationship with the government. The revised regulations do not require government registration for a religious group to obtain institutional benefits, but doing so allows religious groups to engage with the government. They allow all religious groups, registered or not, to apply for tax exemptions and worker or resident visas directly with the pertinent government institutions. Registration is free, the process usually takes one week, and the MOJ provides assistance in completing the application forms.

According to the law, all prisoners, regardless of their religious affiliation, may practice their religion and seek the ministry of someone of their same faith.

The law mandates that all schools, public and private, provide religious education through the primary and secondary levels, "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." The law permits only the teaching of Catholicism in public schools, and the Ministry of Education requires the presiding Catholic bishop of an area to approve the public schools' religious education teachers. Parents may request the school principal to exempt their children from mandatory religion classes. The government may grant exemptions from the religious education requirement to secular private schools and non-Catholic religious schools. Non-Catholic children attending Catholic schools are also exempt from classes on Catholicism. The law states schools may not academically disadvantage students seeking exemptions from Catholic education classes.

The law requires all employers to accommodate the religious days and holidays of all employees; this accommodation includes allowing an employee to use annual vacation leave for this purpose.

Foreign religious workers must apply for a visa through the Office of Immigration of the Ministry of Interior. If the religious group registers with the MOJ, the immigration office accepts this as proof the applicant group is a religious organization. If the group does not register with the MOJ, the immigration office makes its decision on a case-by-case basis.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

In July the government removed a 2016 requirement that religious entities seeking to register must have at least 500 adult members, changing it to allow any group to register voluntarily regardless of its size or categorization. At year's end, the government had registered 133 non-Catholic groups that had voluntarily requested registration, an increase from 115 in 2017, including the Church of Jesus Christ and a number of small evangelical Protestant groups. According to the MOJ and local interfaith groups, the government accepted and approved the applications from all interested religious groups, and there were no reported denials.

Some Catholic Church members and members of religious minorities continued to criticize aspects of the 2011 religious freedom law, stating it maintained institutional preferences for the Catholic Church, particularly regarding tax exemptions. In its regular meetings with the MOJ, the Interreligious Council continued to press for equal access to government benefits for all religious groups, including tax exemptions on income, import duties, property, and sales; visas for religious workers; and opportunities to serve as military chaplains. Members of the council said they were pleased with the new regulations and the government's response to requests for tax benefits from non-Catholic religious groups.

The executive branch, through the MOJ, continued to engage religious communities on matters affecting the communities, including the registration process, taxation exemptions, religious worker visas, budgetary support for religious groups, and prisoners' rights to religious practice. The MOJ continued to interact regularly with the public through its Office of Catholic Affairs and Office of Interfaith Affairs for non-Catholic Religious Groups. Government engagement with religious groups included regular conferences, workshops, and other interfaith

meetings to discuss the registration process, joint charity campaigns, public outreach, and cultural events. The government and religious groups, including the Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, and various Protestant churches, hosted these engagements for the entire community.

According to the MOJ's Office of Catholic Affairs, the government continued to pay stipends to the Catholic cardinal, six archbishops, and approximately 1,000 other Catholic Church officials, totaling approximately 2.6 million soles (\$770,000) annually. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons employed by the Church received remuneration from the government in addition to Church stipends, including 44 active bishops, four auxiliary bishops, and some priests. These individuals represented approximately one-eighth of the Catholic clergy and pastoral agents. In addition, the government provided each Catholic diocese with a monthly institutional subsidy, based on the 1980 concordat with the Holy See. According to Catholic Church representatives, the Church used these and other Church funds to provide humanitarian services to the poor, regardless of their religious affiliation or nonaffiliation. Similar stipends were not available to other religious groups.

Protestant pastors said some non-Catholic soldiers continued to have difficulty finding and attending non-Catholic religious services because by law only Catholic chaplains may serve in the military.

MOJ representatives organized an interfaith meeting in March to coordinate religious community humanitarian support for approximately 600,000 Venezuelans in the country during the year and to ensure all religious groups provided services to them regardless of their religious affiliation.

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

The Interreligious Council continued its dialogue among religious entities including evangelical and other Protestant groups, as well as Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, and Church of Jesus Christ representatives. The council engaged religious communities on the government's revised religious freedom regulations, the protection of religious freedom, and assistance to displaced Venezuelans regardless of their religious affiliation or no affiliation.

Jewish community leaders said some individuals continued to engage occasionally in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories on social media, usually focused on Israel, but they did not provide specific examples. They said the government and both private

and government-run media did not engage in this activity. Muslim and Jewish community members again stated some public and private schools and employers occasionally required their members to use accumulated leave for non-Catholic religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Yom Kippur, an option in accordance with the law.

At one well-attended interfaith event in October, the Church of Jesus Christ hosted an expert panel to discuss the importance of religious freedom, stressing this freedom includes the right to have no particular religion. Several government officials and former officials participated in the event.

Religious groups and interfaith organizations coordinated with the government, civil society, and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance, regardless of their religious affiliation, to the hundreds of thousands of displaced Venezuelans entering the country since 2015. There were no reported attempts to proselytize. Various evangelical Protestant and Catholic churches in Tumbes worked with the government, International Organization for Migration, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to provide temporary housing to Venezuelans entering the northern border.

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

Embassy officials encouraged the government to apply the 2011 religious freedom law and its 2016 implementing regulations in a manner equally fair to all religious groups. Embassy officials discussed implementation of the revised regulations with government officials and advocated for additional changes to promote government respect for religious diversity and the equal treatment of all religious groups under the law. The embassy attended five interfaith events during the year, engaging both government and civil society participants on religious freedom topics.

Embassy officials met with representatives of the Interreligious Council, academics, the Catholic Church, Protestant and evangelical Protestant groups, and the Church of Jesus Christ, Jewish, and Muslim communities to discuss equal treatment of religious groups, anti-Semitism, the government's implementation of the revised religious freedom regulations, and the voluntary registration of religious groups. Embassy officials encouraged religious groups to work together to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans in the country regardless of their religious affiliation or nonaffiliation. The embassy featured the 2017 International Religious Freedom report on social media.