

BRAZIL 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable, and it provides for the free exercise of religious beliefs. The constitution prohibits federal, state, and local governments from either supporting or hindering any religion. In March the Federal Supreme Court (STF) ruled animal sacrifice in religious rituals was constitutional, noting special protection for traditional Afro-Brazilian religions was necessary due to the country's history of discrimination against these religions. The Rio Grande do Sul State Court of Justice continued the prosecution of individuals charged in a 2005 anti-Semitic attack against three men wearing kippahs in Porto Alegre, the state capital. In March a military police officer and a courthouse official prevented lawyer Matheus Maciel from entering two courthouses in the state of Bahia because he was wearing a religious head covering. Maciel was later permitted to enter a courthouse after he called the Bahia State Brazilian Bar Association (OAB) and reported the incident. In April the administration of Tarcila Cruz de Alencar Elementary School, located in Ceara State, removed history teacher Maria Firmino from the classroom for teaching the culture and history of Afro-Brazilian religions. On January 3, President Jair Bolsonaro signed into law a bill allowing public and private school students, except those in military training, to postpone taking exams or attending classes on their day of worship when their faith prohibits such activities. On August 21, the Sao Paulo Legislative Assembly approved a bill establishing administrative sanctions on individuals and organizations engaging in religious intolerance. The Senate passed a bill creating the annual National Day of Spiritism, to be celebrated on April 18, and a second bill designating Jaguaratama in Ceara State as the National Capital of Spiritism. On January 21, municipalities throughout the country commemorated the National Day to Combat Religious Intolerance. On March 26, Sao Paulo State Secretary of Justice and Citizenship Paulo Mascaretti launched an awareness campaign with the Inter-Religious Forum, an entity with civil society and religious group participation, to combat intolerance.

According to national human rights hotline data and other sources, societal respect for practitioners of minority religions continued to be weak, and violent attacks on Afro-Brazilian places of worship, known as *terreiros*, continued. Although less than 1 percent of the population follows Afro-Brazilian religions, 30 percent of the cases registered by the human rights hotline involved victims who were practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions. According to the National Secretariat of Human Rights of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights, the national

human rights hotline received 506 reports of religious intolerance in 2018, compared with 537 in 2017. From April to August, media reported members of criminal organizations attacked several *terreiros* in the Baixada Fluminense region of Rio de Janeiro State, expelling religious followers and preventing Afro-Brazilian religious services. On June 13, Rio de Janeiro police officers from four different police stations, including the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police Office for Racial Crimes and Crimes of Intolerance (DECRADI), launched an operation to detain individuals who participated in the attacks and arrested eight individuals. In January, after television network Record News lost a 15-year lawsuit in which it had been accused of promoting religious intolerance towards Afro-Brazilian religions, the organization paid a 600,000 reais (\$149,000) fine and produced and broadcast four 20-minute programs on Afro-Brazilian religions. Religious organizations hosted interfaith community events, including the 22nd Azoany Walk in Defense of Religious Freedom in Salvador, Bahia, on August 16, which convened approximately 2,500 practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions to advocate for the protection of Afro-Brazilian culture and religion.

In April and September, U.S. embassy officials engaged the coordinator for religious diversity at the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights to discuss the government's efforts to promote religious tolerance and prevent violence towards Afro-Brazilian religions. In July embassy officials met with the Federal District Special Police Station for the Prevention of Crimes of Discrimination based on Race, Religion, Sexual Orientation, Age, or Disability (DECRIN), which specifically covers religious hate crimes. As a result of nomination by the embassy and consulates, Ivanir dos Santos, an Afro-Brazilian activist and religious leader, was a recipient of the Secretary of State's International Religious Freedom Award for his exceptional commitment to advancing religious freedom. His work included founding the Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance, an independent organization composed of representatives from different religious groups, members of civil society, police, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, which documents cases of religious intolerance and assists victims. In April embassy and consulate officials met with representatives from the Israeli Federation of Rio de Janeiro to discuss anti-Semitism in the country. In May embassy and consulate officials met with representatives from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) at their national headquarters in Sao Paulo to discuss the importance of protecting religious freedom. In May and August officials from the Recife Consulate met with representatives of the Israeli Federation of Pernambuco to discuss issues affecting the Jewish community. Sao Paulo Consulate officials met with evangelical Christian leaders in July to discuss the role of religious leaders in promoting religious tolerance. In December the

embassy hosted an interfaith dialogue on religious freedom for seven representatives from six religious and interfaith organizations to discuss the state of religious freedom in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 210.3 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to a 2016 Datafolha survey, 50 percent of the population identifies as Catholic, compared with 60 percent in 2014. During the same period, the proportion of atheists increased from 6 percent to 14 percent, and the proportion of evangelical Christians increased from 24 percent to 31 percent. According to the 2010 census, 65 percent of the population is Catholic, 22 percent Protestant, 8 percent irreligious (including atheists, agnostics, and deists), and 2 percent Spiritist. Adherents of other Christian groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, as well as followers of non-Christian religions, including Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Afro-Brazilian and syncretic religious groups such as Candomble and Umbanda, make up a combined 3 percent of the population. According to the census, there are 588,797 practitioners of Candomble, Umbanda, and other Afro-Brazilian religions, and some Christians also practice Candomble and Umbanda. According to a nonrepresentative 2017 survey of 1,000 persons older than age 18 by researchers at the University of Sao Paulo, 44 percent of Brazilians consider themselves followers of more than one religion.

According to the 2010 census, approximately 35,200 Muslims live in the country, while the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil estimates the number to be 1.2 to 1.5 million. The largest communities reside in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu, as well as in smaller cities in the states of Parana and Rio Grande do Sul.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil, there are approximately 125,000 Jews. The two largest concentrations are 65,000 in Sao Paulo State and 29,000 in Rio de Janeiro State.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable, and the free exercise of religious beliefs is guaranteed. The constitution prohibits the federal,

state, and local governments from either supporting or hindering any specific religion. The law provides penalties of up to five years in prison for crimes of religious intolerance, including employment discrimination, refusal of access to public areas, and displaying, distributing, or broadcasting religiously intolerant material. Courts may fine or imprison for one to three years anyone who engages in religious hate speech. If the hate speech occurs via publication or social communication, including social media, courts may fine or imprison perpetrators for two to five years. It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell literature that promotes religious intolerance.

Religious groups are not required to register to establish places of worship, train clergy, or proselytize, but groups seeking tax-exempt status must register with the Department of Federal Revenue and the local municipality. States and municipalities have different requirements and regulations for obtaining tax-exempt status. Most jurisdictions require groups to document the purpose of their congregation, provide an accounting of finances, and have a fire inspection of any house of worship. Local zoning laws and noise ordinances may limit where a religious group may build houses of worship or hold ceremonies.

According to a March STF ruling, animal sacrifice in religious rituals is constitutional.

Government regulations require public schools to offer religious instruction, but neither the constitution nor legislation defines the parameters. By law, the instruction must be nondenominational and conducted without proselytizing, and alternative instruction for students who do not want to participate must be available. Schools are required to teach Afro-Brazilian religion, history, and culture. A law, signed by President Bolsonaro on January 3, allows public and private school students, except those in military training, to postpone taking exams or attending classes on their day of worship when their faith prohibits such activities. The new law guarantees the right of students to express their religious beliefs and mandates that schools provide alternatives, including taking replacement exams or makeup classes.

The law prohibits public subsidies to schools operated by religious organizations.

A constitutional provision provides the right of access to religious services and counsel to individuals of all religions in all civil and military establishments. The law states that public and private hospitals as well as civil or military prisons must comply with this provision.

A Sao Paulo State law establishes administrative sanctions for individuals and organizations engaging in religious intolerance. Punishment ranges from a warning letter to fines of up to 9,000 reais (\$2,200).

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

Government Practices

The prosecution of six individuals charged in a 2005 anti-Semitic attack against three men wearing kippahs in Porto Alegre, the Rio Grande do Sul State capital, continued. Initially, 14 individuals, members of a neo-Nazi skinhead gang, were charged. By year's end, five of the 14 were convicted and imprisoned, one had his charges dropped, and six were awaiting trial or adjudication.

On March 13, media reported a military police officer and a courthouse official tried to prevent lawyer Maciel, who wore an Afro-Brazilian religious head covering known as *ekete*, from entering two courthouses in Salvador, Bahia. The Bahia Court of Justice prohibits the wearing of head coverings inside courthouses. Maciel was later permitted to enter the building after he reported the incident to the OAB, a nationwide independent organization that regulates legal professions. According to media reports, Maciel criticized what he characterized as attempts to restrict his freedom; Maciel contacted members of the Religious Intolerance Commission of the OAB, which convened a meeting with all involved parties to discuss how to avoid similar incidents.

Although public and private schools are required to teach Afro-Brazilian religion, history, and culture, media reported in April that Tarcila Cruz de Alencar Elementary School administration removed history teacher Maria Firmino from the classroom for teaching the culture and history of Afro-Brazilian religions. The school, located in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceara State, informed Firmino's lawyer that it intended to remove her from the classroom indefinitely and assign her to an administrative position. Firmino, a follower of Candomble, filed a complaint against the school at the Juazeiro do Norte Regional Police Station for not respecting her religious freedom. The Federal Prosecutor's Office for Citizen's Rights asked the Juazeiro do Norte Department of Education for more information on the removal. The State Prosecutor's Office of Ceara State filed a motion to initiate an administrative proceeding on May 9, requesting additional information

about the case from the education secretary and the school's administrative director. Ceara Civil Police continued to investigate the case through year's end.

In March the STF ruled animal sacrifice in religious rituals was constitutional. The Rio Grande do Sul State Public Prosecutor's Office brought the case before the court, challenging a state court ruling permitting practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions to perform animal sacrifices. The STF ruling stated that ritualistic animal sacrifice in Afro-Brazilian religions is not unconstitutional as long as it is "without excess or cruelty." Justice Luis Barroso noted that special protection for traditional Afro-Brazilian religions was necessary due to the country's history of discrimination.

Afro-Brazilian religious leaders from Rio's northern suburbs who were victims of religious intolerance said police were indifferent to attacks on their places of worship, as evidenced by a lack of investigations and arrests.

In a special session on August 29, the Senate honored Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti, who is widely recognized as "the father of Spiritism in Brazil." Bezerra de Menezes, who died in 1900, was known as a pacifist and humanist who defended the right of individuals to follow Spiritism at a time when the doctrine was not widely accepted. The Senate passed a bill creating the National Day of Spiritism to be celebrated annually on April 18, the day Allan Kardec published the *Book of Spirits* in 1857 in France, the sacred text of Spiritist doctrine. The Senate passed a second bill designating Jaguaratama, Ceara State, the hometown of Menezes, as the National Capital of Spiritism. Ceara Senator Eduardo Girao, a Spiritist himself, led these initiatives.

On January 21, municipalities around the country commemorated the National Day to Combat Religious Intolerance. The State Attorney's Office in Salvador, Bahia, organized an Affirmative Week of Religious Freedom that included an interfaith walk, workshops to discuss victims' assistance channels and strategies, and a seminar on the importance of the judiciary system and the role of religious leaders in the promotion of religious freedom.

On March 26, Sao Paulo State Secretary of Justice and Citizenship Mascaretti launched an awareness campaign against religious intolerance within the state. The Inter-Religious Forum, an entity with civil society participation, coordinated the campaign through meetings, seminars, and promotion of the national human rights hotline. The forum has 101 members and unites representatives of 22

religious groups, including Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Afro-Brazilian, atheists, and agnostics.

In September the government released its third report on the ICCPR, presenting the main legislative, judicial, and administrative measures implemented by the government between 2004 and 2018, to protect the rights specified in the ICCPR. Highlights included the creation of the Religious Diversity Policy Advisory Board in 2011 under the then-National Secretariat of Human Rights and the creation of the participatory National Committee on Religious Diversity in 2013. Both entities are responsible for planning policies to defend and promote religious freedom, confronting discrimination and religious intolerance, and promoting secularism. The report also highlighted the adoption of a 2012 recommendation that requires the inclusion of a field on religious intolerance in criminal investigation records.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although less than 1 percent of the population follows Afro-Brazilian religions, 30 percent of the cases registered by the human rights hotline involved victims who were practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions. Four percent of instances recorded by the human rights hotline involved violence. Media reported multiple incidents where individuals and groups destroyed *terreiros* and sacred objects within.

Some religious leaders stated that attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious groups had increased throughout the country in recent years, attributing the increase in violence to criminal groups and a climate of intolerance promoted by evangelical groups.

In June media reported unidentified individuals vandalized the Ase Olode Ala Orum *terreiro* in the Madureira neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, damaging the walls and destroying sacred objects. This was the second attack on the same site in less than four months. According to media reports, the religious leader, known as a *pai de santo*, decided not to press charges because he feared reprisal.

According to media, on July 11, evangelical Christians, reportedly involved in drug trafficking, attacked a Candomble temple in the Parque Paulista neighborhood of Duque de Caxias, in the Baixada Fluminense region of Rio de Janeiro State. The individuals broke into the temple, in operation for more than 50 years, and forced the priestess to destroy all the symbols representing the *orishas* (divine beings). They also threatened to set fire to the temple if the practitioners did not stop holding regular religious services.

On April 11, media reported members of criminal organizations attacked a *terreiro* in Flora Park, Nova Iguacu, in the Baixada Fluminense region of Rio de Janeiro State and expelled its members. The property is located outside the Buraco do Boi *favela* (informal housing development), which according to multiple media sources is controlled by criminal organizations. According to media, criminals expanded their territory into the *favela* and banned Afro-Brazilian religious services. Someone sprayed graffiti stating, “Jesus owns this place” on a public wall in one neighborhood.

In May the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office (MPF) urged the governor of Rio de Janeiro State to respond to the growing number of attacks reportedly targeting practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions and their places of worship in Rio de Janeiro State’s Baixada Fluminense region. According to the MPF, drug traffickers led by an evangelical Christian pastor were threatening practitioners in the region, intimidating them, and preventing them from attending religious services and organizing religious gatherings. The MPF reported the continuing pressure had forced the closure of at least 15 *terreiros* in Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro State, in May alone.

According to media reports, on June 13, Rio de Janeiro State police officers from four different police stations, including the DECRADI, launched an operation to prevent further attacks against *terreiros* in Nova Iguacu in Rio de Janeiro State. According to media reports, the MPF requested information from 120 religious groups operating in prisons with Rio de Janeiro State Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration permission. According to human rights sources, many of the perpetrators were former or current drug traffickers who converted to evangelical Christianity in prison, where they became radicalized to attack religious minorities and upon release, participated in the violent acts. In August police officers identified the organizers, a group of drug traffickers calling themselves Bonde de Jesus, and arrested eight persons accused of participating in the attacks, including the alleged leader of the group, Alvaro Malaquias Santa Rosa.

In other attacks on *terreiros*, it was unclear if the perpetrators were affiliated with a particular religious group. On January 12, media reported six armed men entered a *terreiro* in Camacari, Salvador, during a public event. The men assaulted and injured the religious leader, Babalorixa Rychelmy Esutobi, and the unidentified photographer for the event. The men robbed members of the *terreiro* as well as their guests, leaving with sacred objects, cellphones, and a car. At year’s end, local police continued to investigate the attack.

On May 6, Campinas council member Carlos Roberto de Oliveira reported to the Public Ministry an attack on the Terreiro de Umbanda Vo Benedita. According to a statement released by the *terreiro*, the attackers vandalized three cars in the parking lot, and members heard the attackers shout, “The Umbanda *terreiros* will be stoned.” An attacker threw rocks and other heavy objects at the building and punctured the car tires of the *terreiro*’s members. Another attacker threatened the *terreiro*’s leader, Joao Galerane, at gunpoint. At year’s end, police continued their investigation.

In May media reported an attack on a Candomble *terreiro* near the Federal University in Maceio, Alagoas State. According to religious leader Veronildes Rodrigues da Silva, someone attempted to break into the *terreiro* on a Sunday night but failed. The attackers returned again at approximately 4 a.m. the next morning. No one was injured; however, the area outside the gate was damaged. Da Silva submitted a complaint to the local Civil Police. According to local sources, the Alagoas State Brazilian Bar Association Social Equality Commission chair asked authorities to investigate the attack and pledged to protect the religious leader. The investigation continued through the end of the year.

In May media reported a group of approximately 50 evangelical Christians organized a religious service in front of a Candomble *terreiro* in Alagoinhas in the state of Bahia. According to the *terreiro*’s leader, the evangelical Christians became aggressive, shouting, “Satan shall die” and “let’s invoke Jesus’ name to shut down Satan’s house.” They also threw copies of the Bible at the gate of the *terreiro*.

According to the Falun Dafa Association of Brazil, in March a Falun Gong exposition in Brasilia was closed early due to pressure from the Chinese embassy, which some Falun Gong adherents said they believed was an attempt to conceal the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of the Falun Gong. According to the association, they displayed the same exhibit at the University of Brasilia in October without Chinese embassy interference.

Between April and June the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) conducted a survey to update understanding of attitudes and opinions toward Jews in 18 countries around the world. In November the ADL released the results of the survey for each country, detailing the scope of anti-Semitic views among the country’s residents. The survey cited 11 stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they agreed with them. The proportion agreeing that various statements

were “probably true” was as follows: 70 percent agreed that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Brazil; 38 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; 63 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust; 27 percent that Jews do not care what happens to anyone but their own kind; 25 percent that Jews think they are better than other people; and 39 percent that other people hate Jews because of the way they behave. According to the survey, 25 percent of the population harbored anti-Semitic attitudes – up from 16 percent in the previous survey in 2015 – which it stated represented the percentage of persons who agreed that a majority of the 11 statements were “probably true.”

From January to August, the Israeli Federation of Sao Paulo recorded 194 incidents of anti-Semitism in the country in its 2019 *Anti-Semitism Report*. From January to November 2018, the federation recorded 46 incidents. The report was based on empirical data with incidents coming from a range of sources, including traditional media, social media, and reports from other branch offices of the organization. The survey reported sightings of swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti.

There were reports of private entities and individuals inciting violence or harassment toward religious minorities on social media and in the press. Between January and August, the Israeli Federation of Sao Paulo recorded 50 incidents of anti-Semitic comments shared on social media. Between January and October of 2018, they recorded five complaints of anti-Semitic comments shared on social media.

In February Arlindinho, the son of a famous Brazilian samba singer, reported suffering persistent attacks on social media due to his religion, Candomble. He reported receiving negative and offensive comments after posting pictures involving his religion on social media. Arlindinho said he was considering filing a lawsuit against the offenders and started a campaign on social media to combat religious discrimination online.

Media reported Idalma Lima, a follower of an Afro-Brazilian religion, received threats on social media for sharing information about a ritual involving animal sacrifice on her Facebook page. Lima, a lawyer living in Santarem in western Para State, said one commenter suggested she sacrifice her minor children instead of the animals. She filed an official complaint with the local police on April 1; police investigated the case as a crime of religious intolerance. The investigation continued through year’s end.

On February 6, on the reality television show *Big Brother Brazil*, contestant Paula von Sperling Viana made a series of derogatory comments about another contestant who was a follower of an Afro-Brazilian religion. Media reported DECRADI had concluded her comments were discriminatory, charging her with causing injury due to discrimination. The Public Prosecutor's Office dismissed the charges in October, finding there were insufficient grounds for the case and citing Viana's right to freedom of expression.

In January Record News lost a 15-year lawsuit in which the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, National Institute of Afro-Brazilian Tradition and Culture (TECAB), and Center for Studies on Labor Relations and Inequality (CEERT) accused the organization of using its programming to promote religious intolerance towards Afro-Brazilian religions. As part of the settlement, the network's parent organization, Grupo Record, owned by Bishop Edir Macedo, the founder of the evangelical Christian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, agreed to broadcast four 20-minute programs on Afro-Brazilian religions designed and produced by TECAB and CEERT. In July Grupo Record began broadcasting the series, titled *The Voice of Afro Religions*. In addition to providing space in their broadcasting schedule and paying the production costs, Grupo Record had to pay 300,000 reais (\$74,600) in indemnities to both TECAB and CEERT, amounting to 600,000 reais (\$149,000) in total compensation.

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights' National Secretariat of Human Rights received 506 reports of religious intolerance via the nationwide Dial 100 human rights hotline in 2018, compared with 537 in 2017. Most of the reports involved discrimination (48 percent), followed by psychological violence, including threats, humiliation, and hostility (31 percent), and institutional violence marked by discrimination in the workplace and other public settings (8 percent). Almost half of the 506 cases of religious intolerance recorded by the nationwide Dial 100 human rights hotline in 2018 were reported in the states of Sao Paulo (91), Rio de Janeiro (61), Bahia (24), Pernambuco (24), and Minas Gerais (23). There were 354 cases from January to June 2019 recorded by the Dial 100 hotline, including Sao Paulo (48), Rio de Janeiro (35), Minas Gerais (14), Goias (9), and Bahia (9). Statistics for the remainder of the year were not available.

According to a December 2018 Datafolha survey, released in January, 26 percent of those surveyed stated they had suffered some form of religious discrimination, with religion as the third-most-cited cause of discrimination, behind social class and place of residence, but higher than discrimination by gender, race or color, and sexual orientation.

On August 18, the *Agora Sao Paulo* newspaper published the results of an information request showing the civil police received 562 reports of religious intolerance between January and April, in comparison with 280 during the same period of 2018. Almost half the cases, 246, resulted in injury, for which the penalty is from one to six months in prison or a fine. The civil police data did not include the actual penalties imposed, but *Agora Sao Paulo* noted that in practice perpetrators are rarely imprisoned for this crime.

According to the Bahia State Secretariat of Racial Equality, there were 35 instances of religious intolerance in the state from January to August. The State Secretariat for Human Rights in Rio de Janeiro reported 123 instances of religious intolerance from January to June. Afro-Brazilian religious groups experienced the greatest number of occurrences, with 18 percent involving practitioners of Candomble, 57 percent other Afro-Brazilian religions, and 1 percent Umbanda. The municipalities in the metropolitan area of the state registered 55 percent of the incidents, followed by 32 percent from the Baixada Fluminense on the outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and 12 percent from the northern part of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

There were several reports of various interfaith groups, including Religions for Peace and United Religions Initiative, working across multiple faiths to promote religious freedom and tolerance. On July 14, hundreds of members of religious groups participated in a peaceful walk to combat religious intolerance in Nova Iguaçu, Baixada Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro State, where evangelical Christian drug traffickers attacked *terreiros* numerous times. On August 16, the NGO Alzira Community Comfort Association held the 22nd Azoany Walk in Defense of Religious Freedom in Salvador, Bahia. Approximately 2,500 followers of Afro-Brazilian religions gathered to advocate for the protection of Afro-Brazilian culture and religion.

On September 15, the NGO Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance organized the 12th Annual Walk in Defense of Religious Freedom at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro. The event drew hundreds of participants from diverse religious and nonreligious backgrounds, including from Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, spiritualism, atheism, Candomble, and Umbanda, and emphasized messages of mutual respect and love.

In Cabo de Santo Agostinho, Pernambuco State, members of Terreiro Ile Ase Sango Ayra Ibona organized a procession to honor the religious deity Oxum and

ask for religious tolerance. Media reported the group walked to the banks of the Pirapama River in July to offer flowers, fruit, and jewelry. The walk helped raise awareness of Afro-Brazilian religions, promote a culture of tolerance, and encourage respect.

According to media, several religious freedom committees of state chapters of the OAB participated in events supporting religious freedom. On May 31, OAB Contagem supported and attended the Sixth Parade Against Racism and Religious Intolerance in Minas Gerais State. OAB Paraiba held the First Roundtable on Religious Intolerance and Racism on May 31. On July 24, OAB Rio de Janeiro established a hotline to receive reports of religious intolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In April and September embassy officials engaged the coordinator for religious diversity at the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights. Representatives from the Directorate for Human Rights Promotion and Education discussed the status of the National Committee for Respect of Religious Diversity and the government's efforts to promote religious tolerance. Embassy officials promoted the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom at the Department of State and the importance of protecting religious freedom.

In July embassy officials met with DECRIN representatives and discussed a DECRIN report documenting cases of religious intolerance in the Federal District.

The embassy and consulates nominated Ivanir dos Santos, a Rio de Janeiro-based Afro-Brazilian activist, academic, and religious leader for the Secretary of State's 2019 International Religious Freedom Award honoring civil society actors who had demonstrated exceptional commitment to advancing freedom of religion or belief. In July dos Santos was selected as one of five awardees honored at the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington. According to Ivanir, the award strengthened his work by raising media awareness and bolstering his credibility among civil society as a regional leader on issues of religious intolerance. Following a series of meetings since receiving his award, the consulate and Ivanir held an interfaith dialogue at a Candomble temple in northern Rio de Janeiro City in September with the participation of Lutheran, Umbanda, and Candomble representatives. Together with the Consul General and other consulate officials, Ivanir and a diverse group of religious leaders described the urgency of combating threats to religious freedom in the country and the importance of U.S. support in raising awareness. Leading several hundred participants in the 12th

Annual Walk in Defense of Religious Freedom at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Ivanir attracted unprecedented media attention and government attention.

In April embassy and consulate officials met with representatives from the Israeli Federation of Rio de Janeiro, a nonprofit association representing the Jewish community, to discuss anti-Semitism in the country.

In May embassy and consulate officials met with representatives from the Church of Jesus Christ at their national headquarters in Sao Paulo.

In May and August Recife Consulate officials met with representatives of the Israeli Federation of Pernambuco and discussed issues affecting the Jewish community. Leaders of the federation shared incidents of religious intolerance and discussed the history of the Jewish community in Recife.

Sao Paulo Consulate officials met with evangelical Christian leaders in July to discuss the role of religious leaders in promoting religious tolerance.

On September 26, officials from the Consulate General in Rio de Janeiro met with Ivanir dos Santos and other Afro-Brazilian religious leaders during a visit to a Candomble temple in Rio's northern suburbs, a temple subjected to incidents of religious intolerance. Dos Santos requested the consulate continue supporting Afro-Brazilian religious institutions and monitoring issues impacting religious freedom in the country.

In October an embassy official met with a representative from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They discussed the Church's interests in promoting respect for religious freedom and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

In December the embassy hosted an interfaith dialogue on religious freedom for seven representatives from six religious and interfaith organizations to discuss the state of religious freedom in the country. Participants represented a cross section of faiths, including evangelical Christian, Protestant, African-descendent, and indigenous. The discussion centered on key challenges impacting religious freedom, primarily the fear some participants said they felt of an intolerant evangelism linked to criminal organizations.