

PERU 2021 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. During the year, the government registered 166 non-Catholic religious groups, compared with 156 in 2020. Among the newly registered groups were the International Center of Holistic Theo-Therapy and the United Korean Christian Church of Peru. In May, the Constitutional Court ruled it was unconstitutional to require a religious entity to have a minimum number of members to register with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ). In response, the MOJ amended registry regulations in July, eliminating the requirement for a minimum number of members for a religious group, previously set at 500. In February, a judge of the 11th Constitutional Court ruled in favor of a terminally ill woman's euthanasia request. The court ruled in this specific case that Ana Estrada, who suffered from a degenerative and incurable disease, had the right to die on her own terms. The Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement opposing the decision for religious reasons and saying the decision violated the country's constitution. The state had an opportunity to appeal the ruling but decided against it. The People's Agrarian Front of Peru (FREPA), a political party founded by and directly affiliated with the Israelites of the New Universal Pact religious group, lost its status as a political party following the April general election due to its failing to meet the threshold of required votes in the April 2020 elections. In July, the MOJ held a seminar to mark 10 years since the establishment of the 2011 Religious Freedom Law. In November, the MOJ held a conference on religious freedom and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence, during which the Vice Minister for Human Rights highlighted the importance of the state's guarantee of religious freedom. In December, the MOJ published a first-of-its-kind report that reviewed the religious landscape in the decade since the 2011 religious freedom law entered into force. The report highlighted the cultural contributions of religious groups in the country and their recent work to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Interreligious Council continued to promote respect, tolerance, and dialogue among different faith traditions, including through virtual events that highlighted respect for migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. The council sponsored the first Interreligious Gathering of Gratitude for the country on its bicentennial in July. In his speech, the then president Francisco Sagasti emphasized the

demonstration of unity and tolerance as exemplified by the religious groups participating in the event. Sagasti also noted the importance of religious diversity, tolerance, solidarity, and equality. In December, the council organized a migration-themed joint Hannukah-Christmas event with the participation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Interreligious Committee on Migrants and Refugees (CIREMI) representatives.

U.S. embassy officials met with MOJ representatives to emphasize the importance of religious liberty and issues related to public health, education, taxation, and military chaplains. Embassy officials also discussed the importance of tolerance and interreligious dialogue with representatives of the Interreligious Council as well as with the Catholic Church, Islamic Association, and members of CIREMI, including in providing assistance to migrants, a shared priority among all parties.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 32.2 million (midyear 2021). The 2017 national census reported the population as 76 percent Catholic (down from 81 percent in 2007); 14 percent Protestant (mainly evangelical Protestant, up from 13 percent in 2007); 5.1 percent nonreligious (up from 2.9 percent in 2007); and 4.9 percent other religious groups (up from 3.3 in 2007). Other religious groups include Israelites of the New Universal Pact (an evangelical Christian religious group of local origin that blends biblical and Andean religious beliefs, with an emphasis on communal farming life), Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

According to the World Jewish Congress, approximately 3,000 Jews reside in the country, primarily in Lima, Cusco, and Iquitos. According to the Islamic Association of Peru, there are approximately 2,600 Muslims in the country, 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. Most Muslims are Sunni.

Some individuals in the Andes and the Amazon practice traditional indigenous faiths. Many citizens practice a syncretic faith that blends Catholicism 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 foundation" of the country.

A concordat between the government and the Holy See accords the Catholic Church certain institutional privileges in education, taxation, and immigration of religious workers. A 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, through the Office of Catholic Church Affairs, or the Office of Interconfessional Affairs for all other religious groups.

Registration with the MOJ is optional and voluntary. The stated purpose of the registry is to promote integrity and facilitate a productive relationship with the government. Religious groups do not have to register to obtain institutional benefits but doing so allows them to engage directly with the government. The regulations 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 helps in completing the application forms.

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

The Ministry of Education mandates all schools, public and private, to provide a course on religion through the primary and secondary levels, but the 2011 Religious Freedom Law specifies that such a course is provided "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Public schools

teach Catholicism in religion class, 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 exempt their children from mandatory religion classes. The government may also grant exemptions from the religious education requirement to secular and non-Catholic private schools. Non-Catholic children attending public schools are also exempt from classes on Catholicism. The law states schools may not academically disadvantage students seeking exemptions from Catholic education classes. According to a 2018 Constitutional Court ruling, government financing for schools operated by religious groups is unconstitutional because it is "incompatible with the principle of secularism." The ruling provides the state must suspend funding for these schools within a reasonable period or establish a general and secular system of subsidies for all private educational institutions regardless of their religious affiliation.

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 National Superintendency for Migration (SNM) of the Ministry of Interior. If the religious group registers with the MOJ, the SNM accepts this as proof the applicant group is a religious organization. If the group does not register with the MOJ, the SNM 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

During the year, the government registered 166 non-Catholic groups, compared with 156 in 2020. Among the newly registered groups were the International Center of Holistic Theo-Therapy, Peruvian Association of the Sokka Gakkai International, the Hallelujah Christian Community, Church of God of Prophecies, Evangelical Church of the Peruvian Northeast, and United Korean Christian Church of Peru. According to the MOJ and local interfaith groups, the government accepted and approved applications from all interested religious groups, with no reported denials. In December, the MOJ director general for justice and religious affairs and the MOJ director for interreligious affairs (in charge of the state's relationship with non-Catholic groups) affirmed the government's commitment to

advancing religious freedom and the fair and equal treatment of all religious beliefs before the law.

In May, the Constitutional Court ruled it was unconstitutional to require a religious entity to have a minimum number of members to register with the MOJ. In response, the MOJ amended registry regulations in July, eliminating the requirement for a minimum number of members for a religious group, previously set at 500.

FREPAP, a political party founded by and directly affiliated with the Israelites of the New Universal Pact religious group, lost its status as a political party following results of the April general election. Although FREPAP obtained 8.4 percent of the national vote and 15 congressional seats in the 2020 parliamentary election, it obtained only 4.6 percent in the April election. This result fell short of the 5 percent threshold to obtain congressional representation and retain status as a political party.

According to the MOJ's Office of Catholic Affairs, the government provided an annual grant of approximately 2.6 million soles (\$655,000) to the Catholic Church for stipends to archbishops and pastors, in accordance with the concordat with the Holy See. Each of the 45 Catholic ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the country also received a monthly subsidy of 1,000 soles (\$250) for maintenance and repairs of church buildings, some of them of significant historical and cultural value. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons employed by the Church received subsidies from the government, in addition to these funds. These individuals represented approximately 8 percent of the Catholic clergy and pastoral agents. 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 non-affiliation. Similar stipends were not available to other religious groups.

The Interreligious Council of Peru, whose members include the Roman Catholic Church, Islamic Association of Peru, Jewish Association of Peru, Baha'i Community of Peru, Brahma Kumaris of Peru, Methodist Church of Peru, and Union of Evangelical Churches of Peru, among others, continued to engage the MOJ to promote religious freedom principles, such as equal access to government benefits for all religious groups (e.g., tax exemptions on income, imports, property, and sales; and visas for religious workers), and the opportunity to serve as military chaplains, all benefits for which the Catholic Church automatically qualifies but for which other religious groups must apply.

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.

In February, a judge of the 11th Constitutional Court ruled in favor of a terminally ill woman's euthanasia request. The court ruled in this specific case that Ana Estrada, who suffered from a degenerative and incurable disease, had the right to die on her own terms. According to media, the Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement opposing the decision, saying, "We must remember that euthanasia will always be the wrong path, because it goes against the inalienable right to life, causes the direct death of a human being and, as a result, is an intrinsically evil act." The bishops also said the court's decision violated the constitution. The state had an opportunity to appeal the ruling but decided against it. The judiciary elevated the case to the Supreme Court to ratify the 11th Constitutional Court's decision. The Supreme Court was expected to hear the case in 2022.

In March, the MOJ held a conference on women, religion and religious organizations, and joint efforts to combat family violence. In July, the MOJ held a two-day seminar to mark 10 years since the establishment of the 2011 Religious Freedom Law. In November, the MOJ held a conference on religious freedom and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence, during which Vice Minister for Human Rights Guillermo Vargas Jaramillo highlighted the importance of the state's guarantee of religious freedom.

In December, the MOJ published a first-of-its-kind report that reviewed the religious landscape in the decade since the 2011 Religious Freedom Law entered into force. The report provided a historical overview of faith communities in the country and further defined the secular nature of the state under the constitution. It also highlighted the cultural contributions of religious groups in the country and their recent work to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Interreligious Council continued its stated goal of promoting just and harmonious societies within a framework of respect, tolerance, and dialogue between different faith traditions. In July, the council hosted an interreligious gathering of gratitude for the country on its bicentennial. Religious groups, including members of the council, participated in the event. Then president Sagasti, then prime minister Violeta Bermudez, and then foreign minister Allan

Wagner participated in the event. In his speech, Sagasti emphasized the important demonstration of unity and tolerance, as exemplified by the religious groups participating in the event.

In the context of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP-26) during November, the Interreligious Council organized virtual interreligious prayer sessions “for Mother Earth” and for a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. Throughout the year, the council promoted the vaccination campaign against COVID-19, starting in February and continuing through year’s end. On December 5, the Interreligious Council organized a migration-themed joint Hannukah-Christmas event with the participation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and CIREMI representatives.

Religious groups and interfaith organizations continued to coordinate with the government, civil society, and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance, regardless of their religious affiliation, to more than 1.5 million displaced Venezuelans who entered the country since 2017. The Catholic Church and various evangelical Protestant churches in Tumbes continued to work with the government, International Organization for Migration, and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to provide temporary housing to Venezuelan migrants at the northern border.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In December, embassy officials met with MOJ officials to express U.S. government support for religious freedom in the country and discuss the government’s initiatives to promote it during the year. Other issues discussed included public health-related regulations for religious services in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, equitable tax and educational policies among all religious groups, and military chaplains.

Embassy officials also engaged representatives of the Interreligious Council, as well as the Catholic Church, Islamic Association, and members of CIREMI, to discuss their efforts to promote tolerance and interreligious dialogue, including by providing assistance to migrants, a shared priority for all.