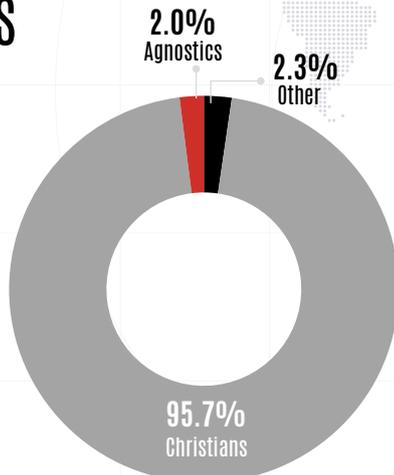




HONDURAS

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The constitution¹ invokes the protection of God in its Preamble and guarantees the free exercise of all religions and faiths without preference insofar as they do not break any laws or violate public order. This right cannot be suspended or restricted in the case of an emergency.

Members of the clergy cannot, according to Article 77, “hold public office or engage in any form of political propaganda, invoking religious motives or [. . .] taking advantage of the religious beliefs of the people.”

Articles 78 and 79 guarantee freedom of association and assembly as long as they do not violate public order and public morals.

Article 151 states that “national education shall be secular” and Article 152 recognises the right of parents to choose the type of education they want for their children.

Religious groups are not required to register. Only the Catholic Church is legally recognised in law.² Unregistered groups can operate but without tax exemptions or other benefits. To obtain legal recognition, religious groups must

apply to the Secretariat of State for Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralisation. The Office of the Solicitor General must review the application.³ Authorised organisations must submit annual reports about their financial situation and activities. They can also ask the Ministry of Finance for tax exemptions and duty waivers.⁴

Foreign missionaries must be sponsored by a Honduran institution and apply for an entry visa and residence permits. The government has signed agreements with the Evangelical Fraternity of Honduras, Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists to facilitate the acquisition of entry visas and residence permits for their missionaries. Groups that do not have written agreements must provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries. The immigration of foreign missionaries who use witchcraft or satanic rituals is prohibited.⁵

Honduras is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Ibero-American Convention on Young People’s Rights. Both recognise the right to conscientious objection in the case of compulsory military service.⁶

The Honduran government only recognises civil marriages. According to Article 13 of the Family Code, members of the clergy of any faith group who authorise a religious

marriage without a civil marriage certificate will be held criminally liable.⁷

Seventh-day Adventists have pointed out that certain educational establishments (schools and universities) do not respect their right to observe the Sabbath.⁸

Article 228 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that the members of the clergy “authorised to operate in the country are not obliged to make any statement in relation to confidential information or secrets they may have heard during the exercise of their ministry and that they are required not to divulge.” The article also says that members of the clergy “must be informed of their right to remain silent,” and that, if they do agree to speak, “they may refrain from replying to any question they do not wish to answer.”⁹

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In June 2018, a number of civil society groups expressed their opposition to a motion that would make reading the Bible mandatory in schools, describing it as an attack against secular education.¹⁰

In August 2018, the 14th International Congress of Religious and Sustainable Tourism was held in the city of Comayagua, organised by the government, unions and the local diocese.¹¹

In September 2018, Honduran Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez condemned acts of vandalism against the St Michael the Archangel Cathedral in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa during a march organised by the Liberty and Refoundation (Libertad y Refundación) political party, and complained about the indifference shown by the authorities.¹² Another act of vandalism was reported in December 2019 when an old church in Tegucigalpa was painted in the colours of the gay pride flag.¹³

In the period under review, two Evangelical pastors were murdered with no clear motive. In August 2019, a pastor who owned an Evangelical radio station was murdered at his home in Santa Bárbara.¹⁴ A few months later, in October, another pastor was shot in his car in San Pedro Sula.¹⁵ A young man was also killed inside a church in Choloma during a religious service.¹⁶ Church authorities noted that most violence against its members originated from criminal organizations, as member churches were present in areas of high violence with minimal state presence.¹⁷

In August 2019, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Honduras ruled in favour of a group of

Seventh-day Adventist university students who were denied the possibility of taking exams and classes on days other than Saturday. The Court ordered the university to come up with regulations that guarantee religious freedom.¹⁸

In October 2019, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Honduras criticised the collusion of politicians with drug traffickers, who have infiltrated state institutions, as well as the Penal Code that violates “fundamental rights and favours offences related to drug trafficking and corruption.”¹⁹

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the government decreed a state of exception and suspended religious celebrations.²⁰ In May 2020 the Catholic Bishops’ Conference released a protocol for religious worship, saying that it is supportive and complies with the measures taken by the authorities.²¹ Two months later, in July, the country reopened, churches included.²²

In September 2020, the government announced plans to deliver biosecurity materials to all churches. The Evangelical Confraternity asked for financial support (via a bonus) for elderly pastors,²³ sparking controversy. Other Evangelical communities decided against it.²⁴ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Honduras said it was unaware of the decree in favour of churches and would not accept the bonus.²⁵

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Between 2018 and 2020, no significant religious freedom violations were reported. Church authorities agreed that in the majority of cases, clergymen were victims of criminal action, whilst in another, a young man was killed in church; in none of these incidents did religion appear to be the cause.

During the same period, the Superior Court of Justice issued a significant ruling protecting the rights of religious minorities. For their part, Churches spoke out against links between people in power and drug traffickers as well as the authorities’ failure to provide protection in certain parts of the country.

Notwithstanding the blight of drug trafficking and related gang violence affecting Honduran society, the situation of religious freedom has not changed and prospects for the future remain stable.

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