

MEXICO 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides all persons the right to religious freedom, including the right to engage in religious ceremonies and acts of worship. The constitution declares the country a secular state. Under the constitution, Indigenous communities enjoy a protected legal structure, allowing them some measure of self-governance to practice their own particular “uses and customs,” with the provision that the law must be applied in line with human rights guarantees in the constitution and in the international conventions to which the country is a party.

The General Directorate for Religious Affairs (DGAR) within the Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB) worked throughout the year with state and local officials on criminal investigations involving religious groups. According to SEGOB, during the year, DGAR investigated five cases related to religious freedom, the same number as in 2021. During the year, the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) opened two religious discrimination cases, compared with three in 2021. In May, CONAPRED worked with the Jewish community to denounce a Nazi-themed wedding held at a Catholic church and urged the Episcopal Conference of Mexico (CEM), which represents the Catholic Church in the country, to instruct Catholic bishops to prohibit antisemitic or discriminatory symbology. In April, local government authorities threatened a pastor and three Protestant families who did not participate in Catholic festivities in the state of Guerrero, forcing the families to relocate to another location in the state. DGAR registered 149 new religious associations during the year, compared with 61 in 2021.

During the year, there were three reported killings of priests as well as multiple attacks on, threats against, and abductions of, priests and pastors. Government officials and leaders within the Catholic Church continued to state that the attacks reflected high levels of generalized violence throughout the country and were not based on religion. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Catholic Multimedia Center (CMC) reported 800 incidents of extortion and threats against priests nationwide between October 2021 and October 2022. CMC reported it accounted for approximately 850 reports yearly for the past five years. According to CMC, the number was likely underestimated because it did not include digital

extortion cases, which priests said have increased since 2020. Religious leaders were often involved in politics and social activism and were thus more vulnerable to generalized violence. Incidents of violence against religious leaders did not appear to be based solely on religious identity. The CMC identified Mexico as the most violent country for priests in Latin America for the 14th consecutive year, reporting killings of more than 39 priests over the past decade. Some NGOs said criminal groups continued to single out Catholic priests and other religious leaders because of their condemnation of criminal activities and because communities viewed them as moral authority figures.

U.S. embassy and consulate general representatives at all levels met regularly with government officials responsible for religious and Indigenous affairs at both federal and state levels. The Ambassador met with Indigenous leaders, including Catholic community representatives called *mayordomos*, who exercise religious, political, and cultural influence at the local level, to discuss freedom of expression and religious freedom. Embassy representatives met with members of religious groups and faith-based organizations, including the Central Jewish Committee, CMC, and CSW (formerly known as Christian Solidarity Worldwide), focusing on the safety of religious workers, humanitarian issues, and expressing support for religious tolerance. The embassy published several social media posts commemorating religious freedom, including U.S. condemnation of religious freedom violations, celebration of interfaith unity, and commemoration of victims persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 129 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2020 Mexican government census (the most recent), approximately 78 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic (compared with 83 percent in 2010); 10 percent as Protestant or evangelical Protestant; and 1.5 percent as other religious groups, including Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), and Islam. More than 2.5 percent of the population report practicing a religion not otherwise specified (compared with more than 2 percent in 2010), and 8.1 percent report not practicing any religion (compared with 5 percent in 2010). Some Indigenous persons practice syncretic religious traditions, including blending Catholicism with Indigenous beliefs.

Church of Jesus Christ officials said their membership is approximately 1.5 million (1.2 percent), while approximately 338,000 individuals (0.3 percent of the population) self-identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ. There are large Protestant communities in the southern states of Chiapas and Tabasco. In Chiapas, evangelical Protestant leaders estimate nearly half of the state's 2.4 million inhabitants (1.6 percent of the country's total population) are members of evangelical Protestant and other Christian groups, including Seventh-day Adventists. Fewer than 20 percent of 2020 census respondents in Chiapas, however, self-identify as evangelical Protestant. There are also small numbers of followers of Luz del Mundo (LLDM), the Old Catholic Church (*Veterocatólica*), and the Church of Scientology, as well as Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Baha'is, and Buddhists. According to media reports, there are 1.5 million followers of LLDM (1.2 percent of the total population), while the 2020 census reports 190,000 followers. The 2020 census lists 29,985 members of East Asian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. According to a 2015 Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez report, there are 50,000 Methodists and 30,000 Anglicans in the country. The Baha'i Faith webpage estimates there are 12,000 Baha'is in the country, with many living in over 200 small communities nationwide.

An estimated half of the country's approximately 100,000 Mennonites are concentrated in the state of Chihuahua. According to the 2020 census, the Jewish community totals approximately 58,800 persons, with 67 percent living in Mexico City and the state of Mexico. In the 2020 census, the Muslim community numbered 7,982 persons. According to SEGOB, nearly half of the country's Muslims are concentrated in Mexico City and the state of Mexico, and 170 are in the state of Chiapas; this does not include an Ahmadi Muslim population of several hundred living in the state of Chiapas, most of whom are converts of ethnic Tzotzil Maya origin. There are also followers of Afro-descendant Orisha beliefs, originating from the African Yoruba religion and referred to by some as "*Santería*" in Spanish.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all persons have the right to follow or adopt the religion of their choosing, or not to follow a religion. This freedom includes the right to

participate individually or collectively, both in public and in private, in ceremonies, devotions, and acts of worship if they do not constitute an offense otherwise prohibited by law. The constitution declares the country a secular state. Secularism is mentioned in three other articles, including one dedicated to education. Philosophical freedoms of conscience and religion receive equal treatment by the state. Congress may not dictate laws that establish or prohibit any religion. Religious acts of public worship should be held in places of worship. Individuals who conduct religious ceremonies outside places of worship, which requires a permit, are subject to regulatory law. Active clergy may not hold public office, advocate partisan political views, support political candidates, or publicly oppose the laws or institutions of the state.

To establish a religious association, applicants must certify that the church or other religious group observes, practices, propagates, or instructs a religious doctrine or body of religious beliefs; has conducted religious activities in the country for at least five years; has established domicile in the country; and shows sufficient assets to achieve its purpose. Registered associations may freely organize their internal structures and adopt bylaws or rules pertaining to their governance and operations, including the training and appointment of their clergy. They may engage in public worship and celebrate acts for the fulfillment of the association's purpose lawfully and without profit. They may propagate their doctrine in accordance with applicable regulations and participate in the creation, management, maintenance, and operation of private welfare, educational, and health institutions, provided the institutions are not for profit.

Religious groups are not required to register with DGAR to operate, but registration is required to negotiate contracts, purchase or rent land, apply for official building permits, receive tax exemptions, or hold religious meetings outside customary places of worship. Effective December 5, religious groups registering for the first time may start their registration online; however, representatives must finalize it in person. Religious groups must apply for permits to construct new buildings or convert existing buildings into places of worship. Any religious building constructed after January 27, 1992, is the property of the group that built it and is subject to relevant taxes. All religious buildings erected before then are considered part of the national patrimony and owned by the state.

Religious associations must notify the government of their intention to hold a religious meeting outside their licensed place or places of worship. Religious associations may not hold political meetings of any kind or own or operate radio or television stations. Government permission is required for commercial radio or television to transmit religious programming.

The federal government coordinates religious affairs through SEGOB. Within SEGOB, DGAR is mandated to promote religious tolerance, conducts conflict mediation, and investigates cases of religious intolerance. If a party presents a dispute based on allegations of religious intolerance, DGAR may mediate a solution. Each of the 32 states has offices responsible for religious affairs. CONAPRED is an autonomous federal agency responsible for ensuring nondiscrimination and equal opportunity, including for members of minority religious groups.

The law provides that prisoners receive dignified and equal treatment from prison staff without distinction based on religious preferences.

The constitution requires that public education be secular and not include religious doctrine. Religious groups may operate private schools that teach religion and hold religious ceremonies at their schools. Private schools affiliated with a religious group are open to all students regardless of their religious beliefs. Students in private schools are exempt from participating in religious courses and activities if the students are not affiliated with the school's religious group. Homeschooling is allowed at the secondary level after completion of schooling at an accredited primary school.

A visa category exists for foreign clergy and religious associates to obtain a temporary resident visa or visitor visa without authorization to perform paid religious activities.

The constitution recognizes the right of Indigenous communities to autonomy, codifying their right to use their own legal systems for the resolution of conflicts within their communities. Indigenous autonomy is subordinate to human rights provisions as defined in the constitution and the international treaties to which the country is a signatory. The constitution also protects the right of Indigenous leaders to practice their own "Uses and Customs," with the provision that the law

must be applied in line with human rights guarantees in the constitution and in the international conventions to which the country is a party.

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

Government Practices

DGAR continued to work with state and local officials to mediate conflicts involving religious intolerance. DGAR investigated five new cases related to religious freedom, the same number investigated in 2021. Most of these cases involved members of minority religious groups who stated members of the majority religious community where they lived had deprived them of the right to basic services and reported facing psychological threats. The cases took place in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Querétaro. According to DGAR, state governments received the most incidents of religious discrimination because the federal government did not have jurisdiction. Some NGOs said municipal and state officials mediated disputes between religious groups, but government officials said this was not official practice. NGOs said municipal and state officials frequently sided with local leaders at the expense of members of minority religions. Some groups also said officials rarely pursued legal punishments against offending local leaders, preferring instead to reach informal, mediated solutions. According to CSW, vulnerable religious communities described high levels of impunity for state officials and a lack of protections granted by these officials, who, they said, often sided with members of majority religious groups.

According to CSW, an Indigenous Baptist woman was hospitalized in critical condition with serious internal injuries after community leaders who identify as Catholic tied her to a tree on December 21 and publicly beat her in the community of Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de los Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo. CSW reported local authorities did not take any action by year's end against the perpetrators of the violent incident, whom community members identified by name and CSW documented in its reporting. According to CSW, "human rights violations" linked to freedom of religion were "ongoing and severe in Rancho Nuevo since 2015." CSW said local authorities repeatedly tried to force members of the religious minority to participate in Roman Catholic religious festivals and members of the religious minority were arbitrarily detained, beaten, barred from accessing medical care, fired from their jobs, blocked from burying their dead, and had their lands and properties arbitrarily confiscated. CSW also reported that

a case involving two Baptist families threatened with expulsion from the same Hidalgo municipality remained unresolved at year's end. In 2021, Hidalgo officials reported working with the families and the local community to resolve the dispute. According to CSW, in 2021, members of the Huejutla de los Reyes municipality threatened to cut off essential services and expel two families belonging to the First Baptist Church if they continued to hold religious services and did not pay the remainder of a community-imposed fine from 2020 for holding religious ceremonies in their homes. The families paid the fine during the year. In 2021, Hidalgo State authorities stated the threatened individuals remained in the community, with access to essential services and able to practice their religion, but they said the case fell under the community's "Uses and Customs Laws." This right of self-governance for Indigenous communities sometimes conflicted with other constitutional rights, including freedom of religion, for members of those communities.

In June, Catholic graduate student Christian Cortez gave a valedictorian speech on what he termed "radical gender ideology" and on the efforts of some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons and women's groups in the country to "redefine family values" at the public Autonomous University of Baja California. A group of faculty members requested the university charge Cortez with "hate speech" and withhold his academic degree and license, rescind his merit award, and notify psychological associations nationwide. Catholic and evangelical Protestants said it was unacceptable to censor Cortez. The lawyer of the U.S.-based Alliance Defending Freedom, Kristina Hjelkrem, said that if Cortez's academic degree was withheld, "It would violate international human rights laws, which are reminiscent of dictatorships, not democracies." In September, the university's council dismissed the complaint.

In November, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice reviewed a constitutional-protection lawsuit opposing the placement of "signs that allude to a specific religious conviction" on public property. In 2020, the NGO Kanan Human Rights filed an injunction against the Chocholá, Yucatán, municipality for displaying a nativity scene that Kanan Human Rights said violated the rights to equality, nondiscrimination, and religious freedom of those who do not identify as Christian. According to some religious leaders, the ruling could prohibit displaying religious symbols on public property throughout the country. On November 6, Catholic bishops issued a statement requesting Supreme Court justices assess the effects that a ruling in favor of the lawsuit would have on the right to religious

freedom. In their statement, the bishops noted that Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to religious freedom and its expression “both in public and in private.”

DGAR registered 149 new religious associations during the year, compared with 61 in 2021. At the end of the year, DGAR listed 9,764 registered religious associations, which included 9,718 Christian, 14 Buddhist, 10 Jewish, three Islamic, two Hindu, and three International Society for Krishna Consciousness groups, as well as 14 new religious expression groups. According to DGAR, new religious expressions groups are defined as philosophical or spiritual communities born of new beliefs or are part of a broader religion, such as Scientology or the Church of the Orishas.

NGOs and some religious organizations continued to report authorities in some rural and Indigenous communities expected residents, regardless of their faith, to participate in and fund traditional community religious gatherings and, in some cases, to adhere to the majority religion. In January, in San Pedro Chimaltepec, Oaxaca, local authorities freed 15 members of an evangelical Protestant church who were previously jailed in December 2021 for refusing to financially contribute to and participate in Catholic religious celebrations. The 15 church members came from six different families. Authorities forced each individual to pay a fine of 5,000 pesos (\$260) and expelled all six families and 20 individuals, including children, from the community. In response, the Oaxaca Human Rights Ombudsman reported it was conducting mediation with local authorities to determine if the act constituted a human rights violation.

On January 11, *El Heraldo de Chiapas*, a privately owned news outlet, published a video of evangelical Christian Alejandro Jiménez Jiménez, a Tzotzil, pleading for help from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. According to Jiménez, Tzotzil Catholics from the Indigenous Mitzitón community in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, burned down a home he was building for his family and expelled him from the community in January 2021. In July 2021, according to CSW, authorities from the majority Catholic community of Ahuacachahue, Guerrero, imprisoned Pastor Severiano Vázquez who, citing his religious beliefs, refused to participate in a Catholic festival. Municipal authorities threatened to burn down Vázquez’s church. In April, local government authorities threatened a pastor and three Protestant families who did not participate in Catholic festivities in Ahuacachahue, Guerrero, forcing the pastor and one family to move to Ayutla de

los Libres, Guerrero. According to sources, the two minority religious families in the community were collecting money to move.

On July 27, *El Heraldo de Chiapas* reported local authorities expelled two evangelical Protestant families from the San Andrés Larráinzar municipality for refusing to pay for a Catholic festivity and fined the families 20,000 pesos (\$1,000). The families reported that the local “Surveillance Council,” over which Pedro Pérez presided, prevented their children from accessing schools.

According to CSW, local Catholic authorities continued to farm the land of one of the four evangelical Protestant families forcibly displaced by Cuamontax local authorities in the Huazalingo municipality, in the state of Hidalgo, in 2019. In February, the Hidalgo State Human Rights Commission requested municipal authorities to open a dialogue with the Cuamontax community, but the municipality did not act on the recommendation by year’s end. On September 29, the displaced families received their land deed after months of paperwork with the agrarian registry, but CSW reported the Catholic religious majority community and local authorities continued to block the return of the families to their homes for not complying with community leaders’ application of the “Uses and Customs Law.”

According to the Christian news site *Evangelical Focus*, six out of 10 families in Chiapas who abandoned their homes did so to avoid religious conflict.

In May, CSW released its *Let Her be Heard* report highlighting women who were disproportionately affected by religious discrimination. The report documented the experiences of 25 Indigenous women in Chiapas, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Jalisco, and Oaxaca States in 2021. According to the report, the types of discrimination that religious minority women were disproportionately or exclusively likely to face included barriers to benefitting from governmental programs for women as well as the denial of prenatal health-care services for pregnant women because of their religious beliefs.

On April 26, SEGOB released a statement warning it would charge religious associations that intervene in partisan politics (political proselytism) with violating constitutional rights on separation of church and state ahead of the June legislative elections. On January 19, the Electoral Judiciary Tribunal ruled SEGOB

should charge Archbishop Carlos Aguiar, Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, and priest Mario Angel Flores Ramos on this basis. The CEM released a statement saying Aguiar, Sandoval, and Flores did not favor a specific party or candidate and the tribunal's decision violated their freedom of expression.

On January 24, Mexico City's Attorney General's Office arrested and jailed under pretrial detention evangelical Protestant pastor and former director of the Biblical Society of Mexico Abner López Pérez for committing fraud against the society. In February, a judge ordered López's release, allowing him to remain in his residence pending his sentencing, as the charges were not serious enough to keep him jailed without a sentence. López's family filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) against Federal Attorney General personnel for excessive use of force during his arrest.

Religions for Inclusion, a government-run interfaith working group, continued to invite experts to discuss religious discrimination and intolerance. In December, the group held its annual forum on human rights and religion. On a quarterly basis, the group discussed its experiences with religious intolerance and discrimination. Members of the group included leaders of the Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, the Church of Jesus Christ, LLD, the Old Catholic Church (*Veterocatólica*), Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Baha'i, Buddhist, Church of Scientology communities, and a DGAR government representative. A Wiccan representative (follower of the Neo-Pagan religion Wicca) joined the group in June. During the year, CONAPRED conducted a course on religious diversity and accompanied religious groups at their ceremonies such as the Jewish commemoration of the Holocaust, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al Adha, and the Baha'i New Year.

In July, the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas issued a statement calling on authorities to cease persecution, repression, and intimidation of its priests, following the arrests of seven priests and church representatives. According to the dioceses, authorities accused the priests of committing violence related to their peacebuilding work in Indigenous communities. In the same press statement, the dioceses said organized crime had infiltrated local police, and the judicial and political systems. Local media outlets reported that the Office of the Prosecutor sought to falsely blame priests for the disappearance of 19 persons in 2021. The disappearances were reportedly committed by a self-defense group

called "*El Machete*," whose stated purpose is to defend against the actions of drug cartels and criminal groups.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders were often involved in politics and social activism and were thus more vulnerable to generalized violence. Incidents of violence against religious leaders did not appear to be based solely on religious identity. The CMC identified the country as the most violent country for Catholic priests in Latin America for the 14th consecutive year, stating more than three dozen priests were killed over the past decade and emphasizing the situation reflected the high levels of generalized violence in the country. According to some NGOs and media reports, organized crime groups continued to single out some Catholic priests and other religious leaders and subject them to killings, extortion attempts, death threats, kidnappings, and intimidation, reportedly due to their perceived access to financial resources or their work helping migrants. Federal government officials and Catholic Church authorities continued to state these incidents were not a result of religious beliefs, but rather were related to the overall security situation and crime. According to NGO sources, criminal elements attacked Catholic priests and other religious figures in order to create fear in the community and a culture of silence, which allowed criminal drug and weapons trafficking to continue unhindered.

During the year, CMC reported the killings of at least three Catholic priests. In May in Tecate, Baja California, authorities found the body of priest José Guadalupe Rivas, who directed the migrant shelter Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, and an unidentified individual after they disappeared for two days. The CNDH called for authorities to issue precautionary measures to protect their families. In November, five unidentified assailants stabbed a Christian pastor to death, beat his wife, and reportedly raped his adult daughter in what media outlets said was a robbery, although the assailants left without taking any money.

On June 20, unidentified assailants killed two Jesuit priests, Javier Campos Morales and Joaquín Mora Salazar, inside a church in Cerocahui, Chihuahua, after tour guide Pedro Palma sought refuge from gunmen pursuing him. The unidentified assailants reportedly killed the two priests for offering sanctuary to a cartel target. The assailants removed the three bodies from the scene of the

crime, which authorities found disposed in the nearby mountains two days later. The killings drew international outrage and President López Obrador publicly lamented the incident and pledged to launch a comprehensive inquiry. The CEM released a statement demanding justice and security for everyone in the country. As a result of the high-profile coverage of the killings, civil society groups and religious leaders representing 4,600 churches organized a month-long national prayer for peace in July. The CEM secretary general, Bishop Ramón Castro, called for the government to design and implement a new security strategy, as well as for authorities to arrest the prime suspect in the homicides, José Noriel Portillo Gil, alias “El Chueco,” a local narco-trafficker reportedly associated with the “Los Salazar” cell of the Sinaloa Cartel. The Chihuahua Office of the Prosecutor opened an investigation of the incident and provided protection for witnesses and their family members. In August, El Chueco reportedly threatened Father Jesús Reyes, a witness to the killings, and warned that he would burn down the community and kill anyone who collaborated in justice processes for the priests. At year’s end, the Office of the Prosecutor had detained 31 individuals connected to the killings, but local priests continued to denounce a climate of fear in the community.

The CMC reported 800 incidents of extortion and threats directed against priests nationwide between October 2021 and October 2022; CMC reported these incidents accounted for approximately 850 reports yearly since 2017. According to CMC, the incidents were likely underestimated because since 2020, priests had reported an increase in digital extortions, a phenomenon the CMC did not monitor previously.

During the year, CONAPRED received two complaints of religious discrimination, compared with three in 2021. An LGBTQI+ person said he was not allowed to receive sacrament at the Church of Jesus Christ because of his sexual orientation.

During the year, CONAPRED continued to document religious discrimination against LLDM members. LLDM followers reported peers at schools and work bullied them and that passersby outside temples verbally attacked members by calling them a “sect.” According to CONAPRED, discrimination against LLDM members was possibly linked to the arrest of its church leader, Joaquin Garcia, on charges of child rape and trafficking.

In May, CONAPRED worked with members of the Jewish community to denounce a Nazi-themed wedding officiated by a Catholic priest on Hitler's wedding anniversary in Tlaxcala on April 29. CONAPRED talked to the CEM to instruct their bishops to forbid antisemitic or discriminatory symbology. On May 4, CONAPRED tweeted, "Mexican Law prohibits antisemitism, that is why we speak out against this manifestation of intolerance and all forms of discrimination." On May 5, the Diocese of Tlaxcala denounced the use of Nazi symbolism during the wedding, and *ACI Prensa* reported that the diocese would investigate why the wedding was permitted and would educate priests to prevent further incidents.

According to some sources, cases of religious discrimination were often not reported due to lack of awareness of the filing process.

On September 4, approximately 15,000 evangelical Protestants participated in a protest opposing abortion, same-sex marriage, and new federal education guidelines that evangelical Protestants said "promote sexuality concepts" for children.

Jewish community representatives evaluating online antisemitic messages, symbols, and language from January through September 30 found that Twitter accounted for 93 percent of the antisemitic content, Facebook 3 percent, news sources 2 percent, and blogs 2 percent. Antisemitic tweets typically referenced the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Jewish Central Committee of Mexico detected an increase in antisemitic statements in May, after reports that Israeli forces had killed Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and in August, after Israeli Defense Forces launched Operation Breaking Dawn.

Media outlets reported that, after Mexico Center for Higher Studies of San Ángel University professor Irene Garcia Mendez told an antisemitic joke during a virtual class in January, the university dismissed her shortly thereafter. In a statement, the university said, "We offer an apology to our students, alumni, professors, and collaborators, as well as to the Jewish Community and to all the people offended by these out of place comments. Respect is the basis that guides our actions." On January 24, news outlets reported the firing of high school history teacher Ana Luisa Nevárez, who in 2016 had dressed up as Adolf Hitler and divided her class into Jews and Nazis as an educational activity to teach about the Holocaust.

According to StopAntisemitism.org, the administration and Nevarez ignored the complaints of Jewish students, and action was not taken until the incident was brought to the attention of StopAntisemitism.org in January.

The Christian NGO Open Doors' *2022 World Watch List* report on the country again reported that criminal groups targeted Christians for being outspoken against violence. According to CSW, Indigenous communities and religious majorities continued to punish or expel community members who left a community's dominant religious group.

In November, in response to a suit by Kanan Human Rights to ban religious displays on public property, the online platform Clear Truths and False Maxims run by apostolic Christian Father Pablo Patrino promoted a contest (Yes to Nativity Scenes) to fill public property throughout the country with nativity scenes. The contest proposed that individuals "place Nativity scenes on public property and send photographs to our social media." In addition, the contest included a written category for participants to submit "an essay of between 2,000 and 5,000 words stating why Nativity scenes and religious symbols have a place on public property."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy and consulate general representatives continued to meet regularly with government officials responsible for religious and Indigenous affairs at both the federal and state levels. Embassy representatives regularly raised religious freedom and freedom of expression issues with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Secretariat of the Interior.

The Ambassador met with various religious and Indigenous leaders individually, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the American Jewish Committee, and Indigenous Catholic community mayordomos, who exercise religious, political, and cultural influence at the local level, to discuss security, migration, freedom of expression and religious freedom.

Embassy representatives met with members of religious groups and faith-based organizations, including the Mennonite Central Committee, Central Jewish Committee, CMC, and CSW, focusing on the safety of religious workers,

humanitarian issues, the status of religious freedom, and support for religious tolerance. Consulate general officials met with the Jewish Social Center (Centro Social Israelita) to discuss tolerance for religious diversity.

The embassy published several social media posts commemorating religious freedom, including U.S. condemnations of religious freedom abuses, a celebration of interfaith unity, and a commemoration of victims persecuted for their religious beliefs.