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USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mexico

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. In August, residents of majority-Roman Catholic Rancho Nuevo, Hidalgo State, robbed and destroyed the home of Baptist Pastor Rogelio Hernandez Baltazar. The vandalism was reportedly in retaliation for Hernandez’s efforts to intervene in a 2022 incident involving Catholic community leaders who severely beat an Indigenous Baptist woman. Authorities had not arrested any perpetrators of the two violent incidents, even though community members identified the assailants by name. In January, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued precautionary measures in favor of 11 Jesuit priests facing a “grave and urgent” situation in Cerocahui, Chihuahua State. According to SEGOB, DGAR investigated three new religious freedom-related cases, compared with five in 2022. During the year, the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) opened two religious discrimination cases, the same number as in 2022. DGAR registered 196 religious associations during the year, compared with 149 in 2022. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) said

municipal and state officials frequently sided with local leaders at the expense of members of minority religious groups. DGAR continued implementing the government's *National Strategy to Promote Respect and Religious Diversity*, which included capacity building for religious leaders and public servants. CONAPRED conducted a course on religious diversity and accompanied religious groups during their religious ceremonies.

During the year, there were two reported killings of priests as well as multiple attacks on, threats against, and abductions of, priests and pastors. Government officials and leaders within the Roman Catholic Church continued to state the attacks reflected high levels of generalized violence throughout the country and were not based on religion. The NGO Catholic Multimedia Center (CMC) reported 800 incidents of extortion and threats against priests nationwide between October 2022 and October 2023. The CMC cited Mexico as the one of the most violent countries for priests, reporting killings of more than 40 priests over the previous decade. According to CONAPRED, incidents of violence against religious leaders did not appear to be based solely on religious identity. Some NGOs said cartels and other 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 consulates general representatives at all levels met regularly with government officials responsible for religious and Indigenous affairs at both federal and state levels. Embassy representatives engaged members of religious groups and faith-based organizations, including the Central Jewish Committee, CMC, and the NGO 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 numerous social media posts advocating religious freedom, including a celebration of interfaith unity, and a commemoration of victims persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Section I.

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 130 million (midyear 2023). According to the 2020 Mexican government census (the most recent), approximately 78 percent of the population identifies as 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, and Islam. More than 2.5 percent of the population reports practicing a religion not otherwise specified, and 8.1 percent reports not practicing any religion (compared with 5 percent in 2010).

Some Indigenous persons practice syncretic religious traditions, including blending Catholicism with Indigenous beliefs.

There are other 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 (Veterocatolica), 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, while the 2020 census reports 190,000 followers. The 2020 census lists 29,985 members of East Asian religious groups, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. According to a 2015 Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez 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 Santeria 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. The constitution stipulates that freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief, may not be restricted or suspended. Congress may not dictate laws that establish or prohibit any religion. 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 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. 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 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, conduct conflict mediation, and investigate 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 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.

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 disputes 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

Abuses Involving Violence, Detention, or Mass Resettlement

According to CSW, on August 10, residents of majority-Roman Catholic Rancho Nuevo, located in Huejutla de los Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State, robbed and destroyed the home of Baptist Pastor Rogelio Hernandez Baltazar. After the incident, the vandals distributed the stolen materials to members of the community. The vandalism of Hernandez Baltazar's home was reportedly in retaliation for a December 2022 incident involving Roman Catholic community leaders who tied up and severely beat an Indigenous Baptist woman, who was hospitalized in critical condition with serious internal injuries and continued to receive medical treatment throughout the year. When Pastor Hernandez attempted to intervene and asked authorities to stop the attack, they assaulted and detained him. At the end of the year, CSW reported authorities had not arrested perpetrators of either of the violent incidents, whom community members identified by name and CSW documented in its reporting.

On January 22, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States, issued precautionary measures in favor of 11 Jesuit priests facing a “grave and urgent” situation in Cerocahui, Chihuahua. The measures were to adopt security measures needed to protect the life and personal integrity of the beneficiaries, including guaranteeing their safety and preventing harassment, intimidation, and violence against them by third parties; adopting protection measures to allow the proposed beneficiaries to continue carrying out their pastoral work without being targeted by threats, intimidation, harassment, and acts of violence; agreeing on any measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; and reporting on the actions it takes to investigate the allegations that led to the issuing of the precautionary measures.

During the year, federal and state authorities committed to implementing the precautionary measures. Authorities established a dialogue on March 16 to discuss security conditions among stakeholders, including religious leaders and state and federal government officials. According to a *Milenio* press report, cyclonic mesh and barbed wire was installed around the church compound in Cerocahui to prevent after-hours access. A mobile command unit was also installed to monitor real-time images of the church.

In a July interview with BBC, Father Esteban Cornejo said 21 members of the National Guard established a presence next to the parish to provide a protective security detail for local religious and pastoral-related travel. Parish structures were provided with additional lighting, surveillance cameras, security bars and protective mesh. Cornejo said, however, there were inconsistencies in the implementation of some protective measures such as providing protective escorts with enough fuel to accompany religious officials on their travels.

Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others

According to the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, local authorities detained Presbyterian Gilberto Diaz Perez for reading the Bible and singing hymns at a family member’s home in Simojovel, Chiapas State. Local Catholic community authorities determined these actions constituted an “offense” under “uses and customs” law. When Diaz’ health began to deteriorate, local authorities released him, in exchange for detaining four other Presbyterians, including Diaz’s wife. The Chiapas State Department of Religious Affairs subsequently engaged in negotiations and authorities released the detainees soon thereafter. CSW reported Chiapas State authorities were negotiating with Catholic community leaders, but as of September 25, the community did not recognize the right of non-Catholic individuals to profess the religion of their choice.

CSW reported communal authorities used the law on “uses and customs” as justification for detaining and intimidating members of the National Presbyterian Church, disrupting their meetings and blocking their legal right to exercise their faith. According to CSW, three families refused to renounce their Presbyterian faith and remained vulnerable to threats that community leaders would cut off the families’ basic services such as water, electricity and education.

CSW also reported a case involving two Baptist families threatened with expulsion from the same Hidalgo State municipality of Huejutla de los Reyes remained unresolved at year’s end. According to CSW, in 2021, members of the municipality threatened to cut off essential services and expel the two families 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 in 2021, after which they were allowed to remain in the community, and their utilities were reinstalled. On February 8, the public prosecutor’s office in Hidalgo ruled the two families were allowed to meet and worship in their homes, but family members said they preferred instead to attend a church outside the community.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Statements by public officials

According to daily newspaper *24 Horas Campecheon*, on June 13, Congressman Hector Malave Gamboa of the ruling National Regeneration Movement (Morena) political party verbally harassed a group of religious protesters who, in front of congress, were demanding the review of a bill that they said, if passed, would limit their freedom of worship. Malave stated the Roman Catholic Church wanted to intervene in state affairs, adding, “The door is going to be closed to the Roman Catholic Church because they have always been opponents of the progressive advances of the left.”

According to DGAR, state governments received most reports of incidents of religious discrimination because the federal government did not have jurisdiction over these cases. DGAR said it continued to work with state and local officials to mediate conflicts involving religious intolerance.

NGOs said municipal and state officials frequently sided with local leaders at the expense of members of minority religious groups. Some groups also said officials rarely took legal action against offending local leaders, preferring instead to reach informal, mediated solutions. CSW reported many cases had stagnated for more than 10 years in the states of Hidalgo, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. According to CSW, local public ministries’ lack of training on religious freedom abuses led to discrimination against members of vulnerable religious communities, illegal detention, abuse of authority, and high levels of impunity. CSW said judicial authorities

avoided violent areas, where community leaders belonging to a majority religious group frequently allied themselves with self-defense groups that would often attack and intimidate members of minority religious groups who refused to participate in majority religious group religious celebrations.

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 community religious gatherings, and, sometimes, to adhere to the majority religion.

CSW reported Roman Catholic community leaders threatened and forced out three Protestant families living in Ahuacachahue, Guerrero State, and the families resettled in Ayutla de los Libres, also in Guerrero. Two Protestant families remained in the community because they lacked resources to relocate. In 2021, Ayutla de los Libres transitioned to a new municipality called Nuú Savi, which is governed by the “uses and customs” law. According to CSW, since 2021, the community had expelled four families and attacked three more families in the neighboring Roman Catholic-majority community of El Mesón Zapote in Guerrero.

On June 12, NGO Kanan Human Rights founder Miguel Anguas reported on X (formerly known as Twitter) that he had withdrawn his injunction against Chochola Municipality, Yucatan State, after receiving threats and hate messages from the National Front for the Family and Pro Net, which Anguas characterized as far-right groups. On June 14, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice removed Anguas injunction from its agenda after he withdrew it, and did not rule on the constitutionality of placing religious displays on public property. In 2020, Kanan Human Rights filed for an injunction against Chochola 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. In 2022, 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 without reaching a decision.

Other Developments Affecting Religious Freedom

According to press reports, Claudia Sheinbaum, the presidential candidate for the ruling Morena Party, was the subject of antisemitic attacks on social media because of her Jewish heritage. In July, former President Vicente Fox Quezada criticized her for “being a Bulgarian Jew” and in September, for “being Jewish and foreigner at the same time.” Also in July, the National Human Rights Commission condemned Fox’s “messages of hatred and discrimination, which do not contribute to the political debate, violate minorities, and are not part of the freedom of expression of the former president.” In December, socialist-associated magazine *Siempre!* issued a cover showing Sheinbaum wearing a swastika

headband and the caption “Let’s Not Let Her Win.” On December 10, Sheinbaum recorded a video stating the magazines’ cover was a disgrace in bad taste and should not go unnoticed. On December 17, the National Electoral Institute ordered the magazine to withdraw all physical and virtual editions within 24 hours, stating the cover promoted hate, discrimination, and violence, and could potentially harm political electoral rights. The magazine’s director, Beatriz Pages, said her intention was not to hurt the Jewish community, but to raise awareness of authoritarianism.

DGAR registered 196 new religious associations during the year, compared with 149 in 2022. By December 15, DGAR listed 9,960 registered religious associations, which included 9,911 Christian, 15 Buddhist, 10 Jewish, five 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.

Between September 2022-September 2023, DGAR implemented the government’s *National Strategy to Promote Respect and Religious Diversity*, which included capacity building for religious leaders and public servants. The training covered topics including peace-building strategies, emotional and mental health support, and the federal laws that govern the establishment of religious organizations. NGO representatives said DGAR’s capacity building training in Chiapas was unprecedented, and they hoped it would provide a roadmap for other states to follow. Some NGOs said municipal and state officials mediated disputes between religious groups, but government officials said this was not official practice. CSW said DGAR authorities in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Hidalgo improved their understanding of religion-based disputes, and in Chiapas, they implemented effective interreligious peacekeeping training. According to CSW, many new disputes were now resolved at the municipal level, unlike in previous years, when many disputes escalated to the state or federal level.

Religions for Inclusion, a CONAPRED-run interfaith working group, met quarterly. Representatives of the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Covenant, Seventh-day Adventist, Old Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Baha’i Faith, Buddhist, Hindu, and Wiccan religious communities attended the meetings. The group presented testimonies by members of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning discrimination resulting from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and by representatives of the Wiccan religion, who said they faced misunderstanding and stereotypes.

During the year, CONAPRED conducted a course on religious diversity and attended religious ceremonies such as Jewish commemoration of the

Holocaust, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al Adha, the Anglican celebration of Holy Friday, and the Baha'i Faith New Year. CONAPRED coordinated religious assistance from the Muslim community to Afghan refugees.

During the year, CONAPRED arranged lectures on religious discrimination and democracy at La Salle University and the Autonomous University of Mexico and said it met with authorities nationwide to promote the rights of minority religious groups.

In June, the Chiapas State Center for Indigenous Languages, Art, and Literature published the translation of the religious association law into the Tzotzil language, with the stated goal of promoting peace by providing religious associations information on their rights and obligations in their native language.

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

ABUSES INVOLVING VIOLENCE, DETENTION, OR MASS RESETTLEMENT

Observers said 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 one of the most violent countries for Roman Catholic priests for the 15th consecutive year, stating more than 40 priests were killed over the previous decade and emphasizing the situation reflected the high levels of generalized violence in the country.

As in previous years, the Christian NGO Open Doors' *2023 World Watch List* report on Mexico stated that criminal groups, including drug cartels, targeted Christians for speaking out against violence. According to CSW, CMC, Open Doors, and media reports, violent organized crime groups continued to single out some Roman 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 Roman 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 Roman Catholic priests and other religious figures 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 two attacks on Roman Catholic priests for conducting humanitarian work, leading to the death of one of them. On May 21, priest Javier Garcia Villafane was shot to death in his car on the

Cuitzeo-Huandacareo highway in Michoacan. He had been assigned to the Capacho Parish church in the municipality of Huandacareo on April 23. The CEM stated his killing was a painful reminder of the dire situation the country faced because of the presence of organized crime and impunity. On October 18, unidentified attackers opened fire on priest and director for the Minerva Bello Center for the Rights of Victims of Violence, Jose Filiberto, while he was driving in the state of Guerrero. Filiberto was unharmed. The Minerva Bello Center for the Rights of Victims of Violence issued a press release reporting the attack was due to generalized violence and demanded authorities take action to detain and punish the perpetrators.

According to *Catholic News Agency* (CNA) on May 21, a man attacked and attempted to kill Archbishop Faustino Armendariz after Sunday Mass in Durango. Municipal authorities arrested the assailant. In response to the attack, digital platform Activate delivered to the CNDH 10,400 signatures demanding it create a protocol to guarantee religious freedom and to prevent and punish those attacking Roman Catholic authorities.

On March 18, authorities found the body of Jose Noriel Portillo Gill (also known as El Chueco, the Crooked One), reportedly associated with the Sinaloa cartel. El Chueco allegedly killed Jesuit priests Javier Campos and Joaquin Morales in Chihuahua in June 2022. Jesuit priest Javier Avila told Spanish language daily newspaper *El Pais*, "Justice is not done with weapons. The death of El Chueco is a failure of the Mexican State." In June, dozens of Indigenous Raramuri persons carried out a peaceful caravan to commemorate the killings of Campos and Morales in Chihuahua.

According to media outlets, in June, unidentified gang members shot and killed two individuals in a Roman Catholic church in Santa Anita, Guachochi, Chihuahua State. Bishop Juan Manuel Gonzalez Sandoval, of the Diocese of Tarahumara, said the building was a house and place of prayer for all believers and a ceremonial center for Indigenous persons. He said, "Desecrating a temple in this way ... is an attack on the root of what is most sacred that human beings have and is a reflection of the degree of barbarism that has been reached by violence and impunity."

The CMC reported 800 incidents of extortion and threats directed against priests nationwide between October 2022 and October 2023, the same numbers reported between October 2021 and October 2022. CMC said these incidents had numbered 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.

According to Mexican daily newspaper *El Universal*, in July, Father Gregorio Lopez Geronimo, also known as "Father Goyo," described acts of violence and corruption in Michoacan, stating he came under threat from the

criminal group “Los Viagras,” an arm of the New Family of Michoacan cartel, because he spoke out against violence and corruption in his community.

Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada* reported that on August 6, Miguel Montoya Moreno, vicar for justice and peace of the San Cristobal de las Casas Diocese, Chiapas State, publicly denounced the increase in threats by both criminal groups and government officials against clergy that condemned violence in the region.

In September, the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of Mexico (CEM) and religious, social, and political institutions held the National Peace Dialogue in Puebla to discuss the root causes of violence in the country, including violence committed by drug cartels. The event concluded with participants signing a peace accord in which they declared their commitment to build and lead a nationwide peace network. The CEM launched the National Peace Dialogue after the 2022 killings of Jesuit priests Campos and Morales in Chihuahua.

ABUSES INVOLVING DISCRIMINATION OR UNEQUAL TREATMENT

During the year, CONAPRED received two complaints of religious discrimination, compared with three in 2022. According to some sources, cases of religious discrimination were often not reported due to lack of awareness of the filing process.

Jewish community representatives who evaluated online antisemitic messages, symbols, and language from October 7 to December 27 found that 22 percent of the conversations about Jewish people had antisemitic undertones, a 6 percent increase from January 1 to September 30, reportedly related to the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on October 7 and the ensuing Israeli response. The messages included debates about antisemitism versus anti-Zionism, a comparison to the Jewish Holocaust, and the use of religious stereotypes to refer to persons of Jewish origin. From October 7 to December 27, the Jewish Central Committee of Mexico detected 38 antisemitic graffiti in Mexico City and others in the states of Guadalajara, Oaxaca, Queretaro, and Morela, as well as a significant increase in antisemitic caricatures published in the press.

According to newspaper *El Pais*, at least two neo-Nazi associations were present in the country: the National Socialist Party of Mexico (Partido Nacionalista Socialista de Mexico) and the Union Nation Revolution (Union Nacion Revolucion). National Autonomous University of Mexico professor Edgar Ortiz said extremist groups were targeting young adults who were unfamiliar with Nazi ideology and therefore more likely to join these groups. According to Ortiz, antisemites in the country combined a mix of eugenics and nationalism, among other ideologies, and Indigenous symbols. Jewish Central Committee representatives said they had

identified a few antisemitic organizers and estimated antisemites in the country numbered in the hundreds but said they did not have verifiable numbers.

According to *El Pais*, clandestine far-right music festivals nationwide were more frequent in 2022 and 2023 than in previous years. In January, civil society organizations in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, convinced local authorities to cancel a concert featuring neo-Nazi Greek band *Der Sturmer* (named after a World War II Nazi publication), scheduled to play at an undisclosed venue, after advertisements promoting the event appeared on social media. Jalisco authorities reaffirmed antisemitic concerts were prohibited and raided 32 venues to ensure the concert did not take place. The concert lineups included neo-Nazi Spanish bands Last Chance, Irreductibles (Diehards), and Batallon de Castigo (Punishment Battalion). In February, daily newspaper *La Jornada* journalist Raul Romero said he received death threats online from self-characterized neo-Nazis after he published a call on social media denouncing these bands. He said many of the persons who threatened him were foreigners.

In July, the soccer club Liga MX club Atlas apologized for a social media post quoting former Nazi propaganda leader Joseph Goebbels in response to an offside decision made in a 1-0 victory over New York City Football Club in a Leagues Cup game, stating, "We reject and are against any value that said regime represented in one of the darkest times of humanity." According to the statement, Atlas would investigate why the post was made and would take appropriate action.

DGAR investigated three new cases related to religious freedom compared with five in 2022. Two of the cases involved members of minority religious groups who stated members of the majority religious community forced them to pay for religious festivities, which led to displacement if they did not comply. The cases took place in the states of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy and consulates general representatives continued to meet regularly with government officials responsible for religious and Indigenous affairs at both 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. Embassy officials met with DGAR and CONAPRED authorities to follow up on specific religious freedom issues, including training for state officials on interreligious issues and conflict resolution with minority religious groups in rural communities in Chiapas and Hidalgo States. The embassy sponsored the participation of the Deputy Director of Education at the Mexico City Government Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination in a U.S. government program on

countering Holocaust denial and antisemitism. Following the program, the participant started to develop a COPRED course for Mexico City public servants to address antisemitism and increase institutional understanding of discrimination against the Jewish community.

The Ambassador met with religious and Indigenous leaders, including representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the American Jewish Committee, to discuss religious freedom, freedom of expression, security concerns, and migration.

During the year, embassy representatives met with members of religious groups and faith-based organizations, including the Jewish Central Committee, CMC, and CSW, focusing on the safety of religious workers, humanitarian issues, including migration and security, the promotion and status of religious freedom, and support for religious tolerance. Consulates general officials met with the Jewish Social Center to discuss tolerance for religious diversity.

The embassy also disseminated numerous social media posts dedicated to advocating religious freedom. These encompassed U.S. condemnations addressing instances of religious freedom abuses, a celebration highlighting interfaith unity, and a tribute honoring victims who faced persecution due to their religious beliefs.

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Austrian Red Cross	Wiedner Hauptstraße	Contact
Austrian Centre for	32, 1041 Wien	Imprint & Disclaimer
Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
Asylum Research and	F +43 1 589 00 589	Data Protection Notice
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(ACCORD)		

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