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2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Brazil

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The constitution states freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable, provides for the free exercise of religious beliefs, and prohibits federal, state, and local governments from either supporting or hindering any religion. The law contains penalties for acts of religious intolerance and discrimination. Religious groups must register with the government to obtain tax-exempt status. Public schools are required by law to offer religious instruction, and all schools must teach Afro-Brazilian religion, history, and culture.

In July, religious representatives from Santa Catarina's Afro-Brazilian communities said, although there is a state law to combat religious intolerance, it remained difficult to exercise their right to religious freedom for members of their communities due to state and federal practices, including numerous military police invasions of *terreiros* (places of worship for Afro-Brazilian religious groups). In January, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva enacted a law imposing a sentence of two to five years for anyone who obstructs, prevents, or employs violence against any religious practice. In January, President Lula announced the establishment of the National Day of Traditions of African Roots and Candomble Nations, to be celebrated annually on March 21. On August 28, the District Federal Court of Justice prevented lawyer Gustavo Coutinho from defending his client in person because he was wearing traditional Candomble clothing, although judges said he could do so via an audio

presentation. In July, police officials from four states simultaneously conducted 15 searches and seizures to combat neo-Nazism. In November, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo became the first cities in the country to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. While Brazil is an observer member of the IHRA, it has not adopted the working definition on a national level.

In April, an estimated 500 individuals from various terreiros marched in Porto Alegre in support of Ogum (an orixa, corresponding to a saint in the Catholic Church) and against religious discrimination. The march departed from the Reino de Ogun e Oxala Temple, which in March was vandalized by unknown persons, who also posted pejorative comments on social media. Media outlets continued to report cases of religious intolerance in different parts of the country. Acts of religious intolerance ranged from derogatory name calling of Afro-Brazilian religious rituals to destroying places of worship.

Although only a small percentage of the population define themselves as followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, including Candomble and Umbanda, a disproportionate number of cases registered by the human rights hotline continued to involve practitioners of those religions. In February, the Interreligious and Ecumenical Forum of Rio Grande do Sul received a complaint of ongoing threats and harassment against a *babalorixa* (spiritual chief) that had been taking place since 2020 near the city of Santa Cruz do Sul. On March 8, in the city of Passo Fundo, Rio Grande do Sul, arsonists targeted the terreiro of babalorixa Alexandre Vieira, which security cameras recorded. Vieira reported other sites of Afro-Brazilian religions were targets for individuals who threw stones or shouted insults. In May, the Federal Public Ministry (MPF) filed a complaint against a reporter from Paraiba State for the crime of religious racism. According to the complaint, Emerson Machado broadcast on local television hate speech against the Candomble religion in 2021. The Sao Paulo Israelite Federation's annual *Antisemitism Report* recorded 411 incidents and allegations of antisemitism in the country from January to September, compared with 331 incidents and allegations registered in the same period of 2022. Representatives from Catholic, Jewish, and Lutheran faiths reported significant movement from their religions to evangelical churches. On January 19, leaders from the Jewish community inaugurated Rio de Janeiro's Holocaust Museum to promote tolerance, prevent genocide, and advance religious freedom.

During the year, U.S. embassy officials engaged with government counterparts to emphasize the importance of religious freedom, including for minority religious groups. In May, the governments of the United States and Brazil relaunched the Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promote Equality (JAPER). U.S. and Brazilian officials also

held a Human Rights Dialogue and discussed the promotion of religious freedom. At both meetings, embassy officials raised concerns with the government regarding reports of widespread intolerance of Afro-Brazilian religions and the rise in antisemitism. Throughout the year, embassy and consulate officials engaged in activities that promoted religious freedom, including attending Candomble and Umbanda ceremonies, visiting a synagogue, and meeting with religious leaders representing Jewish and Afro-Brazilian faiths.

Section I.

Religious Demography.

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 218 million (midyear 2023). According to Datafolha, a private polling institute, the 2022 electoral polls showed that 49 percent of respondents are Catholic, 26 percent evangelical Christians, 14 percent adhere to no religion, and the remaining 11 percent do not specify a religion. These numbers remain relatively unchanged from a 2019 Datafolha survey that showed 50 percent of the population identifies as Catholic, 31 percent as evangelical Christians, and 11 percent adheres to no religion.

According to the 2010 census, the most recently available data from official sources, 65 percent of the population is Catholic, 22 percent Protestant, 8 percent irreligious (including atheists, agnostics, and deists), and 2 percent Spiritists. Adherents of other Christian groups, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, followers of non-Christian religions such as Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, and Afro-Brazilian and syncretic religious groups, including Candomble and Umbanda, make up a combined 3 percent of the population. According to the census, there are approximately 600,000 self-defined practitioners of Candomble, Umbanda, and other Afro-Brazilian religions. Approximately 2 percent of the population practices Afro-Brazilian religions (some of which incorporate Indigenous traditions), and 3 percent are Spiritists. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) believe that Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners are systematically underreported, given the number of terreiros located across the country, and the prevalence of fluid religious identities in many communities. Many members of Indigenous groups follow traditional beliefs. According to recent surveys, many individuals consider themselves followers of more than one religion.

According to the 2010 census, approximately 35,200 Muslims live in the country, while the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil estimates the number to be 1.2 to 1.5 million. The

largest communities reside in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguacu, as well as in smaller cities in the states of Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul.

The Israelite (Jewish) Confederation of Brazil estimates there are 120,000 Jews in the country. The two largest concentrations are 70,000 in Sao Paulo State and 20,000 to 30,000 in Rio de Janeiro State.

According to the president of Federacao Espirita do Rio Grande do Sul, an umbrella organization encompassing several Spiritist groups, the number of persons who are comfortable saying they are Spiritists has increased in recent years.

Section II.

Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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

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

It is a crime to manufacture, sell, distribute, or broadcast symbols, emblems, ornaments, badges, or advertising that use the swastika for purposes of promoting Nazism, punishable

with two to five years' imprisonment.

The law protects the right to use animal sacrifice in religious rituals.

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

Rio de Janeiro State law permits public and private schools to include subjects in their curricula that address respect for freedom of belief and worship; religious and cultural diversity; the important influence of Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Jewish faiths in the formation of national society; the relationship between religious freedom and the secularity of the state; and the legal consequences of intolerance against expressions of religion.

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

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

A Sao Paulo State religious freedom law, revised in January, regulates the constitutional principle of free exercise of faith and imposes fines of up to 95,910 reais (\$19,800) for verifiable cases of disturbances of religious ceremonies, vandalism of sacred symbols, and discrimination in schools, such as prohibiting the use of religious attire. Repeat offenders may be fined up to double that amount. A board consisting of members from the Secretary of Justice and Citizenship analyzes, investigates, and deliberates over allegations of religious discrimination. The Secretary of Justice of the State of Sao Paulo has the authority to impose the fines, as they are administrative fines, not criminal. After deliberations, the Secretary of Justice issues the fines to the perpetrators, who have the right to appeal.

The municipality of Recife enacted a law in June that promotes tolerance and respect for diversity of religious views. The law guarantees freedom of belief and worship, in addition to

combating religious discrimination. The statute states freedom of speech and preaching does not include the spreading of hatred or discrimination against any group, on any basis. The law calls for the protection of children and adolescents from any form of discrimination and violations of their physical, moral, and emotional integrity because of their religious beliefs.

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

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

The case filed against Fernanda Carneiro, then Secretary of Tourism and Culture of Uruburetama in Ceara State, remained pending at the end of the year. On July 10, the Public Ministry of Ceara (MPCE) denounced Carneiro and filed a charge against her based on a federal antidiscrimination statute. Due to mitigating circumstances (minimum penalty of less than four years for the crime and the subject having no criminal record), the MPCE proposed a Criminal Non-Prosecution Agreement, which Carneiro rejected because she said she had not committed a crime. In 2022, media reported Carneiro stopped the performance of a dance group, stating it was a “macumba ritual” and it was disrespectful to bring “macumba” to a religious festival. Performance participants subsequently filed a formal complaint, stating they were victims of religious intolerance. The MPCE opened an investigation of the complaint, and Carneiro later resigned her position.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

The Dial 100 hotline received 894 claims of religious intolerance and 1,060 allegations of violations of religious freedom during the year.

The NGO Center for Articulation of Marginalized Populations reported Afro-Brazilian victims of religious intolerance in the state of Rio de Janeiro continued to view police and the judiciary as being indifferent to attacks on Afro-Brazilian places of worship. The organization cited a lack of investigations and arrests in cases of religious intolerance and said law enforcement and the judiciary rarely held offenders accountable.

In July, religious representatives from Santa Catarina’s Afro-Brazilian communities said, although there is a state law to combat religious intolerance, it was difficult to exercise their

right to religious freedom for members of their communities due to state and federal practices. These representatives reported numerous cases of military police invasions of terreiros, which were generally unregistered. As an example, in Florianopolis, a municipal law describes terreiros “as entertainment places.” Religious representatives said they had tried to change the municipal law for a long time without success.

In January, President Lula enacted a law imposing an increased sentence of two to five years' imprisonment on anyone who obstructs, prevents, or employs violence against any religious practice. The penalty increases by 50 percent if the crime is committed by two or more persons and includes a fine. The law does not specify the amount of the fine; the presiding judge makes that determination. Previously, the law's potential sentence ranged from one to three years of imprisonment.

On August 28, the District Federal Court of Justice prevented lawyer Gustavo Coutinho from defending his client because he was wearing traditional Candomble clothing while in court. The judges decided unanimously Coutinho could not address the court because regulations required that he wear formal attire, and consequently, another lawyer defended his client. After the session, Coutinho reported the incident to the state bar association. According to a court judge, the court provided Coutinho the opportunity to present his case via audio that the voting judges could hear while in session or postponing the trial until after the holy period when his religious custom required him to wear Candomble clothing. In consideration of the fact that the holy period extended for three additional months, Coutinho declined the offers.

During the week of January 21 that commemorated the National Day Against Religious Intolerance, the Cultural Center of Federal Justice (CCJF) in Rio de Janeiro hosted a series of seminars and debates focused on strengthening tolerance, diversity, and peaceful coexistence of religions. At the end of the week, the Center for Articulation of Marginalized Populations published the *Report on Religious Intolerance in Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean*. The CCJF, Ford Foundation, Freedom of Religion and Belief in Action Fund, UNESCO, and TV Rede Globo organized and sponsored the events in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, the state of Bahia held public events throughout the week with representatives from Afro-Brazilian religions and NGOs Koinonia and Ecumenic Coordination of Services to promote religious tolerance. An event in the municipality of Itapua paid tribute to Mae Gilda, an Afro-Brazilian religious leader as a symbol of the fight against religious intolerance. At another event in the historical center of Salvador, members of different religious groups participated in an interfaith walk. On January 21, the Secretariat of Social Assistance and Human Rights in the city of Paulista in Pernambuco State held a municipal meeting to combat religious intolerance. Different

religious representatives attended the event to discuss the role of religion, with a focus on fraternity and the search for peace among all faiths.

In March, Mato Grosso do Sul State Deputy Joao Henrique Catan compared the lack of transparency of the state government to the burning of the German Reichstag while holding a copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office opened an investigation into his actions, which remained pending at the end of the year.

Other Developments Affecting Religious Freedom

In January, President Lula announced the establishment of the National Day of Traditions of African Roots and Candomble Nations, to be celebrated annually on March 21.

On June 12, Mayor of Recife Joao Campos signed a law that established the municipality's Statute of Religious Freedom to promote tolerance and respect for diversity of religious belief. According to the law, the municipality will promote public policies to combat religious intolerance within families or communities.

In July, police officers of four Brazilian states conducted 15 searches and seizures to combat neo-Nazism. Authorities executed court orders simultaneously in the municipalities of Florianopolis, Blumenau, Joinville, and Curitiba in Santa Catarina; Praia Grande in Sao Paulo; Curitiba, Maringa, and Marialva in Parana; and Nova Petropolis and Passo Fundo in Rio Grande do Sul. Police arrested two persons in the act of committing these crimes and seized a large amount of material, including posters, guns, ammunition, cell phones, and computers. The searches were the result of deepening investigations into operation "Gun Project," launched in 2022, which investigated a neo-Nazi cell in Santa Catarina for manufacturing firearms using a 3D printer. In addition to producing propaganda for the purpose of promoting Nazism, the members of the cell performed rituals honoring Hitler's doctrine and called themselves "the new SS of Santa Catarina."

On July 14, the Sao Paulo Interreligious Forum for a Culture of Peace and Freedom of Faith, a state entity whose members are religious representatives from the city of Sao Paulo, celebrated the creation of a similar office in the city of Santos, located on the coast, as part of an initiative to replicate the forum statewide. Santos is the fourth city within the state of Sao Paulo to create a similar entity.

Some civil society leaders praised the Police Office for Combating Intolerance in the state of Rio Grande do Sul for consolidating efforts regarding discrimination in one office, which simplified victims' ability to seek support. Afro-Brazilian religious representatives, however, reported the office was not effective in responding to religious intolerance cases, and other civil society leaders said concentrating different types of discrimination in one office could undermine its investigative ability. According to civil society leaders in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, race was a contributing factor in many cases of religious intolerance.

In March, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship signed an agreement with the Republic Museum and the Public Attorney's Office to search for objects from Umbanda and Candomble temples that Rio de Janeiro police seized between 1890 and 1946. Leandro Grass, president of the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage, said, "This comes with the goal of contemplating the desire of civil society and bringing to this collection and this material a look of respect, of consideration, because this material was seized in actions that had, as a basis, a legislation based against the so-called profane rituals that, in fact, were of African origin, a crime. Symbolically it is very important."

The Porto Alegre Interfaith Group includes leaders from the Catholic, Kardecist Spiritist, Jewish, Zen Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist, Islamic, Baha'i Faith, Umbanda, and Afro-Brazilian, Anglican and Lutheran faiths. The group continued to report there was an increase in the number of evangelical Christians serving on the city's *conselhos tutelares* (guardianship councils providing social services focused on protecting children and adolescents' rights). According to the group, persons elected to the councils were not politicians, and their responsibility was to provide social assistance to families, children, and adolescents facing problems such as violence, hunger, and homelessness. The group also stated, in recent years, the *conselheiro tutelar* position became increasingly sought after by individuals affiliated with evangelical churches and who aspired to political office on the local level. Leaders of the Porto Alegre Interfaith Group further said these churches reportedly used members who served as *conselheiros tutelares* to advocate the churches' political views, including on religious freedom and human rights.

In November, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo became the first cities in the country to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Brazil is an observer country of IHRA but has not adopted the working definition on a national level.

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although only approximately 2 percent of the population were followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, a disproportionate number of cases registered by the human rights hotline continued to involve practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions. Media continued to report multiple incidents in which individuals and groups destroyed terreiros and sacred objects belonging to communities of followers of Afro-Brazilian religions. During the year, civil society organizations reported Indigenous populations continued to experience discrimination against their religious practices.

According to a 2022 survey that the National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions conducted, almost half of a representative sample of 255 interviewees reported being the victim of an attack in the previous two years. Researchers defined this phenomenon as religious racism, noting African and/or Indigenous religions were the most common target of intolerance due to negative stereotypes ascribed to Blacks, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized persons.

In April, an estimated 500 individuals from various terreiros marched in Porto Alegre in support of Ogum (an orixa or a divinity corresponding to saints in the Catholic Church and in Umbanda's syncretism, compared to Saint George) and against religious discrimination. The march departed from the Reino de Ogun e Oxala Temple, where one-month prior unknown assailants attacked its facade and posted pejorative comments on social media. Police investigation of the attacks on the temple remained pending at year's end.

According to the Jewish Observatory, the number of incidents involving neo-Nazis increased from 49 in 2021 to 89 registered cases during the year. The observatory reported 25 incidents related to antisemitism during the year, compared with 18 incidents in 2021. The report was based on a range of sources, including traditional media, social media, and reports from branch offices of the organization. The survey reported a variety of activities, including sightings of swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti, antisemitic hand gestures, verbal and physical aggressions, and propaganda.

On November 30, the Israelite Federation reported 467 antisemitic incidents since the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, a 961 percent increase in comparison with the previous year. On December 28, the *Miami Herald* newspaper reported officials foiled an alleged plot last month against Jewish targets that included suspected local Hezbollah recruits as well as individuals flying into the country after meeting with Hezbollah leadership in

Lebanon, according to federal police and the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, which stated Israel's intelligence services assisted in the operation.

In November, Rio de Janeiro State's Israeli Federation (FIERJ) announced the creation of an online platform to collect data and identify possible antisemitic attacks in social media. According to FIERJ, two weeks after the platform was launched, it received 80 reports of possible cases of antisemitism. The platform also provided legal advice and support for potential victims who decide to file criminal complaints.

According to the Brazilian Jewish Confederation's 2022 *Report on Antisemitism in Brazil*, 16 of 26 states in the country reported cases of antisemitism. The confederation said 385 of the 496 allegations it received were classified as antisemitic.

The state of Santa Catarina reported the second largest number of cases despite its relatively small population. The majority of its population descends from German and Italian immigrants to this area of Rio Grande do Sul, with most being Catholic. According to media reports, nearly 30 percent of the country's 1,117 neo-Nazi groups – approximately 320, with close to 10,000 members statewide – call Santa Catarina State their home. In April, Santa Catarina Civil Police arrested 10 members of a neo-Nazi cell linked to the Hammerskins, a white supremacist and neo-Nazi group founded in the United States. Police alleged these individuals were responsible for recruiting and radicalizing youth online and in person in Santa Catarina.

In February, the Interreligious and Ecumenical Forum of Rio Grande do Sul received a complaint of threats and harassment that had been taking place since 2020 against a babalorixa near the city of Santa Cruz do Sul. The babalorixa said he received numerous harassing messages, including curses, threats, and derogatory graffiti, which escalated into actions such as spilling salt on doors and gates on commemorative dates for orixas and other deities. (Throwing salt on images of other religions, especially Afro-Brazilian images, signals the assailants considered the religion to be evil.) The babalorixa also said additional threats demanded an end to the activities of the Candomble terreiro. The Candomble adherents reported unidentified persons followed and spied on them. According to lawyer Edoarda Scherer, the crimes continued without police investigation, despite what he considered strong evidence.

On March 8, in the city of Passo Fundo, Rio Grande do Sul, arsonists targeted the terreiro of babalorixa Alexandre Vieira, which security cameras recorded. Vieira reported other sites of

Afro-Brazilian religions were targets for individuals who threw stones or shouted insults. He said he filed reports of the incidents with police.

In May, the MPF filed a complaint against a reporter from Paraiba State for the crime of religious racism. According to the complaint, Emerson Machado broadcast on local television hate speech against the Candomble religion in 2021. The MPF alleged Machado's speech exceeded the limits of freedom of expression. Machado allegedly condemned all practitioners of Candomble and attempted to convince viewers to do the same. In view of the facts presented, the MPF requested a custodial sentence and a fine, in addition to reparation for the social damages and losses caused to the community. A court ruling remained pending at year's end.

The Court of Justice of Paraiba sentenced a woman in July to one year in prison for criminal acts characterized as religious prejudice. According to the complaint, the accused, Ile Ase Omi Karelewa, lived next to the Candomble terreiro located in the state's capital Joao Pessoa. Video recordings showed that Omi Karelewa threw objects at the terreiro wall during celebrations. According to the terreiro priest Diego Logunsky, the attacks began approximately five years prior.

Catholic, Jewish, and Lutheran representatives reported a significant migration from their religions to evangelical churches. A representative of the Episcopal Church also reported a migration to evangelical churches but said an influx of LGBTQI+ persons and supporters countered this trend because the Church celebrates same-sex marriage. According to the religious leaders, the reasons for the migration were both the strong influence of evangelicals in political and media environments and their active participation in many civil society organizations. Afro-Brazilian religious and Spiritists representatives reported the opposite: an increase in the number of their adherents, which the census verified.

On January 19, leaders from the Jewish community inaugurated Rio de Janeiro's Holocaust Museum to promote tolerance, prevent genocide, and advance religious freedom.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During the year, embassy officials engaged with government counterparts to emphasize the importance of religious freedom, including for minority religious groups.

The Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism expressed U.S. support for the Jewish communities in the country during his December 5-8 visit to Brasilia and Sao Paulo. He articulated the U.S. focus on addressing antisemitism in meetings with federal, state, and municipal government and law enforcement officials, in addition to Jewish community organizations and group leaders. He advocated Brazil adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism and appoint a special envoy to combat antisemitism.

On May 23, the United States and Brazil relaunched the U.S.-Brazil JAPER and held their bilateral Human Rights Dialogue at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs led the U.S. delegation. U.S. officials underscored the importance of religious freedom and spiritual practices and its intersection with race and ethnicity. Brazilian and U.S. officials discussed religious freedom in the JAPER meeting and Human Rights Dialogue, focusing on the discrimination that many Afro-Brazilians face while practicing Afro-origin religions. In Brazil, many, including participants in the JAPER meeting, refer to this discrimination as religious racism. U.S. officials described tolerance education as a tool to counter community-based violence against persons of African descent and Indigenous communities. Brazilian counterparts said the law required schools to teach Afro-Brazilian culture but did not specify how or what material should be introduced in the curriculum. Officials said teachers lacked adequate training to teach the material or engage with students, resulting in little accountability and enforcement and many schools treating the subject as optional. U.S. officials encouraged further collaboration to leverage tolerance education as a potential JAPER output.

Members of the U.S. delegation and embassy officials visited Belem in the state of Para on May 25-26 and met civil society representatives who described governmental and societal abuse and discrimination toward Black practitioners of African-based religions as religious racism. In several meetings, practitioners of African-based religions rejected the idea of promoting "tolerance" to address their marginalized status as insufficient, instead emphasizing their inherent human dignity that deserves respect.

On January 26, officials at U.S. Consulate Porto Alegre organized an event with Rabbi Marcos Perelmutter from the Porto Alegre Israeli Center on "Judaism and Antisemitism" to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. On February 14, local digital newspaper *GZH* published an article written by a consulate officer and Rabbi Perelmutter focused on "Remembering Our Roots to Foster Tolerance."

On March 24, the Ambassador and the Sao Paulo Consul General hosted a lunch discussion for representatives from the Sao Paulo Jewish community to learn about their social and

religious activities. During the lunch, the Ambassador emphasized the U.S. commitment to freedom of religion worldwide and expressed appreciation for the social assistance that the Jewish community provided to vulnerable communities, a message also delivered during a visit to the Holocaust Memorial in Sao Paulo on March 26.

On June 5, a Sao Paulo consulate officer visited a Candomble place of worship as part of a U.S. State Department Office of International Religious Freedom visit to observe their practices with regard to LGBTQI+ inclusion and discuss religious racism. A same-sex couple managed the place of worship, which had a transgender woman serving as assistant and promoted LGBTQI+ rights. On June 6, officers from the consulate participated in a meeting with representatives from the Interreligious Forum for a Culture of Peace and Freedom of Faith at the Sao Paulo State Secretary of Justice Secretariat to discuss promotion of religious tolerance and prevention of violence. On June 7, consulate officials met with leaders of the Brazilian Federation of Islamic Associations and discussed the promotion of religious tolerance and prevention of violence.

In July, the Consul General in Porto Alegre hosted a meeting with the Porto Alegre Interfaith Group that included Catholic, Jewish, Episcopal, Anglican, Lutheran, Afro-Brazilian religious, Spiritists, Islamic, Zen Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist, and Baha'i Faith representatives. During the meeting, Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish leaders discussed the challenges of maintaining membership in their churches. In December, the Consul General invited members of the group to her residence for a dinner during the 25th anniversary of the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act and a discussion of issues of religious tolerance in Brazil, connecting them with government representatives who work on human rights and religious intolerance matters.

In April, the embassy highlighted on its social media platforms the month of Ramadan – a time of reflection, prayer, charity, fasting, and community – during which the Consul General in Sao Paulo met with representatives and leaders of Sao Paulo's Islamic and Lebanese communities and reinforced the U.S. commitment to defending religious freedom.

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