



OBSERVATORY OF  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
IN LATIN AMERICA

# BIANNUAL REPORT

---

*PERIOD:*  
*JANUARY - JUNE 2021*

---





## ABOUT US

OLIRE is an investigation, training and advocacy program monitoring and documenting the state of religious freedom in Latin America. We offer a space for the understanding and promotion of religious freedom from an academic, non-confessional and non-partisan perspective, which enables the strengthening of research on religious freedom and violations of this right in the region

## AREAS OF WORK



### Monitor

We document, research, and analyze the state of religious freedom and its possible limitations throughout the states of the region. In particular the position and vulnerability of religious minorities whose rights are being violated.



### Empower

We train citizens, political actors, and international institutions on the right to religious freedom and the extent of hostilities and violations of said right in Latin America.



### Influence

Our objective is to participate and actively influence the social and public sphere, on a national and multilateral level, in order to improve the protection of the right to religious freedom.





## POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: A BRIEF REGIONAL DESCRIPTION

Throughout the first half of the year 2021, COVID-19 remains a determining aspect for the political, economic, and social destiny of the region.

According to the Economic Development Department of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([CEPAL](#), 2021), “Negligible growth prior to the crisis, coupled with the contraction of 2020, resulted in record declines in occupation, unprecedented increases in unemployment, falling incomes and increases in poverty and inequality

that further exacerbated the region’s pre-existing structural problems”. In addition, fiscal policies executed in the year 2020 to counter or decelerate the pandemic crisis resulted in a historical spike of public expenditure, which, combined with the reduction of public income due to a lack of tax collection, provoked a significant increase in public debt for various states in the region.

This challenging economic context has further exacerbated the social crisis and citizen discomfort, as

shown by the continuation of social protests during the current year. On more than one occasion, such protests have stopped being democratic social expressions and have transformed into situations of social violence, with an equal or greater violent response by the authorities.

The absence of financial resources, the increasingly evident governmental and administrative deficiency to face crisis, and the high rate of corruption in various countries of Latin America have resulted in the distrust of public institutions, also significantly influencing the results of recent public elections in the region. As a result, the rise of authoritarian and populist leaders offering short-term and immediate solutions, but without a political, economic, or social plan with long-term results, is being seen.



**Source:** "The Foreign Service and the Church will collaborate in the care of migrants", *El Sol de México*

**Source:** "Catholic Church presents initiative to support families affected by COVID-19 pandemic", *Cáritas del Perú*



Within this context, religious communities, associations with a religious ethos, and religious leaders in general have played an important role, not only through an accompanying spiritual dimension, but also as true agents of cooperation and humanitarian assistance, especially in zones where governmental reach has not been possible. Nevertheless, facing the weakening rule of law and democracy, reinforced by the excessive and sometimes arbitrary measures adopted in the context of COVID-19, the rise in corruption and the violation of human rights has been inevitable, and includes a greater vulnerability for religious freedom and religious communities.

During the first half of this year, religious leaders seen as opposing or critical of the government in states with authoritarian tendencies such as Cuba and Nicaragua are still the target of various types of hostility, with cases of physical violence and arbitrary arrest to defamation. In states such as Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador and Honduras, the lack of attention to public order and the attention given by authorities to the control of the pandemic has contributed to exacerbated violence in the hands of organized crime, drug trafficking, guerrillas, or gangs, and has increased the risk to the security of religious leaders, especially those who, as part of their mission, also act as human rights defenders or report cases of crime and corruption.



In Mexico and Colombia, as well as Argentina and Chile, radical secular groups, on many occasions with the support of governmental authorities, allow limitations to the freedom of expression of confessional actors in the public sphere. In accordance with normative provisions of equality and non-discrimination, sanctions of religious leaders or people known by their faith are more frequent. All of this has contributed to discrimination towards people who identify and try to live by the guidelines of their own faith.

Furthermore, during the first half of the year 2021, religious services are still conditioned by the impact of coronavirus and the previously given authorization for the continuation of activities, in many cases, at the discretion of mayors, governors or other local authorities. In few cases, even when religious leaders have the faculty of determining the protocols to be followed in each temple, their conditions have to adhere to the approved guidelines of the authorities. In other exceptional cases, authorities have communicated with

some religious leaders to jointly determine the measures to be followed in places of worship, but in the majority of cases, it is the government who decides unilaterally and mostly arbitrarily, which activities stay or are suspended, including religious ones.

The range of identified hostilities against the right to religious freedom from January to June 2021 has been numerous. The pandemic has greatly contributed to the decrease of guarantees and protective measures for religious communities; nevertheless, the crisis has also shown the important role that they still play for the benefit of social development and the promotion of justice and peace, aspects that are very necessary in a reality as turbulent as that of Latin America.





# LATIN AMERICA: THE STATE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This report will present the various challenges to the full exercise of the right to religious freedom in the region. To this end, we will briefly describe the varying contexts where religious communities have been exposed, considering the following categories:

## 1

## Regulation of religion by organized crime

During the first six months of the year, criminal groups continued the enforcement of dynamics developed during the pandemic. Throughout this time, they achieved the expansion of their control over full populations and territories, particularly in Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Cartels, guerrillas, gangs, and other criminal groups have taken into their power various territories. The de facto power given by their leaders conveys the implementation

of a structure where the government or the security forces of the state have little or no influence. The local governments usually have to negotiate with gangs to fulfill their basic functions; they even pay fees to enter determined areas.

In other cases, these are the same authorities who, in coalition with these groups, make the continuity of their activities possible.

In many cases, with drug trafficking being one of the main activities of these groups, this has resulted in disputes over the control of territories, transportation routes, and distribution, among other issues. These clashes influence the high level of insecurity, which also generates massive displacement of families and whole communities.

As common practice, in these contexts, authorities have entrusted the state's security to armed forces, through strategies or public policies that gave a wider scope of action to the military. Nevertheless, these measures, far from reducing violence, have increased the levels of insecurity and the rate of criminality, as well as the human rights violations of the population. In some contexts, there have been reports of violence as a result of the abuse by the national police and military in the cases of disproportionate use of public force registered during some social protests



**Source:** "Explosives attack against a church in Hacarí, North of Santander", *El Bogotano*

Amidst these violent scenarios, religious communities, as well as religious leaders with greater political or social influence and participation, who act as social leaders in defense of human rights, justice, the natural environment, and the right to land, among others, have been threatened, kidnapped, or murdered for their critical voice, for reporting corruption or trying to stop illicit activities by criminal groups. Even the work of religious groups focused on humanitarian assistance to counter the repercussions of

the pandemic are at constant risk of criminal response such as robbery, or armed strikes, without mentioning that many religious leaders require the permission of these cartels, guerrillas, or gang leaders to continue their activities in certain areas.



**Source:** "Mexico: The Church in Chiapas cries out for justice for the murder of catechist Simón Pérez", *Vida Nueva Digital*

The economic crisis, the increase in the population living in extreme poverty, and the closing of schools has also influenced a greater number of children and young people to enlist in the ranks of criminal groups. This also signifies that educational or rehabilitation programs led by religious groups face the risk of being dismantled. Religious leaders also worry for their own children and their survival due to them facing the risk of being recruited or obliged to obey the demands of organized crime groups.

Churches and most Christian religious leaders continue to face extortion, kidnapping and death threats. In many

cases, these incidents lead to the banning of activities of worship, sometimes even online activities, with the goal of protecting the integrity of the few people authorized to assist and transmit religious services. Many churches in rural areas have changed the schedule of their services, so that believers may assist without risking their safety. It is common for these groups to impose unofficial curfews under which no one from the community may leave their home after a certain time in the evening.

In addition to this, criminal groups continue to destroy and steal from temples of worship, especially Christian temples, as a form of

generating more income. Even during recent protests and unleashed social violence, religious temples have been the target of vandalism and other attacks.



## 2

### **Religious restrictions motivated by an antireligious political ideology (communism) and by the totalitarian control of the government**

In countries like Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, the health crisis generated by COVID-19 has intensified the already excessive concentration of power and erosion of democratic control, at the expense of the fundamental freedoms of their citizens.

Religious leaders, especially Christians, have faced scrutiny and surveillance practices due to their being the vocal critics of these totalitarian regimes. In the case of Cuba, restrictions and hostility

against religious leaders known or seen as opposing the regime have been increasing in severity, with the exception of those members of the Cuban Churches Council. In the first half of the year pastors and Christian leaders who are members of social movements have been under constant surveillance, and faced arbitrary arrests and excessive fines, as well as police summons without a legal basis. Temples, especially unregistered churches, have been sieged, vandalized, or demolished. Owners of sites

where religious services by unregistered churches were held have been pressured to avoid using their property, as a way to restrict such religious activities. This is not to mention other measures related to restrictions around leaving the country or reuniting with the congregation.



In the midst of the latest historical social protests on Cuban land, more and more religious leaders are raising their voices against the injustices of the regime and are openly supporting those who take to the streets to protest. More and more Catholic priests have described the difficult situation on the island, in spite of the silence by the highest authorities in the Catholic Church. This has led to attempts of censorship, arrests, physical attacks, constant monitoring, business closures, and confiscations, among other issues, for this group of Christians.

In Nicaragua, Sandinista groups, with the acquiescence of the regime, have vandalized and violently broken into temples, especially those of the Catholic Church. To date, the regulations that require entities that operate in Nicaragua under the order or supervision of an external body to register as foreign agents with the Ministry of the Interior and report their financial movements on a monthly basis, are maintained. This is an uncertain situation for the foreign funding of religious organizations/activities in the country.

**Source:** "Priest beaten and arrested amid historic protests and brutal repression in Cuba", *Aciprensa*



Other acts of intimidation that can be referred to are: restrictions on the provision of humanitarian assistance in the midst of the natural disasters that affected the country, smear and disinformation campaigns about the clergy and the activities of the Church, a deliberate and indiscriminate increase in the rates of basic services to the temples, threats and physical attacks on pastors for not aligning with the regime, as well as acts of desecration and vandalism in the temples, especially during the commemoration of the 2018 protests.



**Source:** "Bishop Abelardo Mata calls desecration of image of Monsignor Suazo an attack on faith", *Artículo 66*

In Venezuela, although not many violent incidents against religious leaders have been reported, pressure against them persists. Talking negatively about the regime puts them at risk of being monitored and can jeopardize their religious activities. This is in addition to sometimes being prevented from providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

In both Cuba and Nicaragua, the versions given by religious leaders about the state of the pandemic in the country continue to be considered subversive and punishable if they contradict the official versions of the government. In Nicaragua, a country where confinement measures were never adopted, the authorities promoted massive religious festivities in the streets, in open contradiction to the Catholic Church's call for voluntary confinement.

Schools still indoctrinate children and adolescents under the ideological guidelines of the political party in power. Parents who express their disagreement or report cases of discrimination either by teachers or fellow students against their children because of the faith they profess, are threatened and silenced

In addition, the political use of religion remains a political strategy to achieve legitimacy among citizens. The approach to some evangelical Christian groups (not representative of the entire evangelical community) depends on the affiliation of these groups or their leaders to the regime and the interests of the party. For them, this has meant greater benefits, or at least the freedom to carry out their activities without major obstacles.

## Hostility towards religious expressions by state and non-state actors

Although there is a normative framework that recognizes the right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of expression, under the principle of Church-State separation or under a radical understanding of the principle of neutrality, attempts have been made to limit or censor the manifestations of religious leaders in the public sphere, especially Christians throughout Latin America. The participation and influence of the religious sector in the public sphere is accepted to a certain extent when it is involved in peace processes or humanitarian assistance, but not in other settings, especially those related to regulations in the education or health sector.

---

**Source:** "Feminists in Oaxaca shout slogans and vandalize temples for International Women's Day", *Debate*

It is increasingly common to identify anti-discrimination norms that limit or put at risk the freedom to express one's own convictions, especially when the content contradicts or criticizes issues of abortion, sexual diversity, gender identity, same-sex marriage, among other related personal choices.

During the first half of the year, we have again witnessed attacks against religious temples, especially Christian temples, and attempts to censor the views of confessional actors. In the context of International Women's Day, radical feminist groups continue to vandalise and attack places of worship to voice their demands and demonstrate their rejection of the Church and its stance against abortion. Sexual minorities seek the defense of their interests through laws and public policies even when this implies censorship or restriction of the right to freedom of expression.



Another important aspect has been the indiscriminate use of social networks as a mechanism to attack confessional points of view. Virtual platforms have been, for some time now, the main stage for hostility against expressions of faith.

Ordinary citizens, without necessarily being affiliated with ideological groups, have also attacked temples. During the most recent social protests, acts of vandalism, desecration and attacks on churches have been a way of manifesting social discontent and the rejection of religious doctrines, particularly Christian doctrines, whose content is understood by some sectors as the cause of structural inequalities in society.



**Source:** "Fire attack affects the front of the Cathedral of Antofagasta", *Bio Bio Chile*



**Source:** "It's official! Churches will be able to celebrate masses from November 15th", *Andina*

In the middle of the second and third waves of COVID-19, from January to June 2021, the return to quarantine, immobilization, or limitation of the capacity for certain activities still depends on the degree / increase of infections in each country or state and affects the development of religious services. Religious celebrations are one of the first limited or totally prohibited activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19, despite the implementation of the corresponding security protocols by each religious group.





## 4

### Hostility towards religious conversion in indigenous communities

Indigenous communities are governed by a special shared worldview. It is in accordance with this worldview, different for each indigenous community, that important aspects for indigenous life in society can be understood. This includes political, economic, and cultural aspects, including the relationship with the environment and religion. Since the religious aspect within indigenous communities largely determines their life in society, those who decide not to continue with the syncretic practices of the population due to religious conversion may become victims of hostilities.

Syncretic practices in these indigenous communities are often related to the Catholic religion. In other words, it is self-styled Catholic tribal leaders who often harass indigenous members that have converted to another Christian denomination, usually evangelical. However, these attitudes of intolerance are typical of traditional indigenous leaders and do not represent the Catholic Church as an institution.

Some incidents related to this phenomenon have been identified in Mexico and Colombia. Converts to a non-syncretic or non-majority religion on the indigenous reserve are particularly vulnerable to human rights

violations. They face various forms of harassment and discrimination, including exclusion from basic services, arbitrary arrests, threats, forced labor, sexual harassment, and even violence. Religious freedom is also severely restricted, as any religious activity contrary to the rites of the people is prohibited. This has led to the forced displacement of entire families, the destruction of their property or pressure to leave the community.





In many cases, these incidents are linked to personal disputes or between communities and certain members. The authorities do not always seem to recognize the elements surrounding religious intolerance; however, this should not be an obstacle to addressing the issues that arise around this problem. Forced displacement is perhaps one of the most serious consequences since it not only implies the uprooting of the convert and his family but also the beginning of a whole cycle of violations of fundamental rights such as the right to life, personal integrity, freedom of movement, personal safety, housing, work, health, food, etc.

In any case, recognizing religious intolerance as one of the causes will help to design and implement affirmative measures that address the causes of the problem and, in the best of cases, to implement preventative measures that protect the right to religious freedom of the members of the reserves or indigenous communities, respecting as far as possible the uses and customs of these groups, in accordance with the human rights of all of the inhabitants.

**Source:** "Houses of evangelicals are burned in Mitzitón", *El Heraldo de Chiapas*

# NEWS MONITORING



The data presented in this section have been obtained with the collaboration of the Latin American Research Unit of Open Doors International.

OLIRE's main activity is monitoring the state of religious freedom in the region, which can be divided into two large areas:



The first one corresponds to incidents of physical violence as violations of freedom of religion. The tool used by OLIRE to document these incidents is the [Violent Incidents Database- VID](#), following specific [reference criteria](#).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1: **Incidence of violence in Latin America** (January - June 2021)

Country	Killings	(Attempts) to destroy, vandalize or desecrate places of worship or religious buildings	Arrests / detentions	Kidnappings	Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	Attacked houses/ property of faith adherents	Forced to leave home
Argentina	0	17	0	0	6	0	0
Brasil	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Chile	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	0	9	0	0	2	0	0
Cuba	0	3	8	0	2	1	0
Honduras	8	0	0	0	14	0	0
México	4	13	9	0	1	11	33
Nicaragua	1	2	0	1	2	1	0
Venezuela	2	3	0	0	5	0	0

Source: OLIRE, Violent Incidents Database – VID

*The updating of this database is continuous, so the total number of incidents may vary as new cases are registered / identified. To view the updated data [enter here](#)*

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the Observatory team does not have the resources to validate each reported incident. If, after an incident has been entered, the users or our collaborators detect that the information provided is not entirely correct or is incomplete, it may be eliminated and / or modified





The second area of research corresponds to the monitoring and subsequent analysis of other forms of **non-physical violence**, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and various forms of pressure.

Here is a limited list of some of the most outstanding news reported and / or identified by OLIRE in the period January-June 2021:



## ARGENTINA

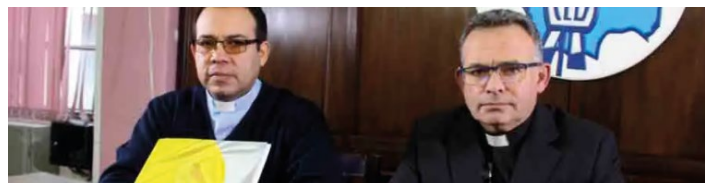


**Source:** "Controversy in Argentina: 'anti-rights blacklist' includes evangelical leaders and entities", *Protestante Digital*

- The health authorities announced extremely **restrictive** measures through the Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU), which included the complete suspension of all sports, social, recreational, and religious activities in closed spaces.
- Pastor Sassarolli and his wife were **arrested** for refusing to close their church in the middle of Phase 1. The pastor refused to close, saying that "churches have to open just like clinics."
- A **page** was launched with a list of names and surnames. "All those listed, anti-abortion activists, national and provincial legislators, pastors and churches, doctors, lawyers, political scientists, denominational schools, media, journalists, influencers and political parties."



## BOLIVIA



**Source:** "Episcopate of Bolivia presents a report on its role in the country's socio-political crisis", *Aciprensa*

- Evo Morales considers leaders of the Catholic Church to have sided with the 'oppressor'. On his Twitter account, former president Evo Morales **said**: "We regret the statements of some leaders of the Catholic Church of Bolivia who side with the oppressor, forget the humble and ask for freedom of coup plotters subjected to justice when they never claimed or mentioned the victims of the Senkata and Sacaba massacres".
- Former President Evo Morales fired off a flurry of tweets **attacking** the Catholic Church, after the Bolivian Episcopal Conference (CEB) overthrew the theory of the "coup d'état" because the MAS delegates accepted, at the dialogue table, the constitutional succession as a way out towards the pacification of the country after the events of October 2019.



- The Bishop of San Ignacio de Velasco has expressed his regret over the hostilities of the government authorities in their attempt to [expropriate](#) the diocesan territory located in Cerro San Ignacio, something that violates the agreement signed in 2019.
- The Attorney General's Office [included](#) the Church on the list of those responsible for the coup. The State Attorney General's Office presented to the Office of Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a report on the "development of protests and other situations of tension, after the general elections of October 20, 2019". In the report she ratified the "narrative" of the coup to explain the responsibilities of the State in the political crisis of 2019.



- The Union of Catholic Jurists of Rio de Janeiro issued a [document](#) following the decision of the Supreme Federal Court, with the reasoning that the prohibition by governors or mayors of conducting collective religious activities in person does not harm the essential core of religious freedom.
- Catholic leaders in Brazil say that a recent decision by the National Penitentiary Department (Depen) to [replace](#) in-person visits by chaplains to inmates with ecumenical closed-circuit radio stations is a direct attack on the Catholic Church and its Pastoral Commission Penitentiary.



- In September 2020, an audio falsely attributed to the Archbishop of Medellín, Monsignor Ricardo Tobón Restrepo, began to circulate virally. On that occasion, the Delegation for Communications of the Archdiocese of Medellín published a statement in order to clarify the situation. In recent days the same audio has gone viral again



■ Source: “The truth about the “Ecumenical Front Line”, the protesting priests in Cali”, *Semana*

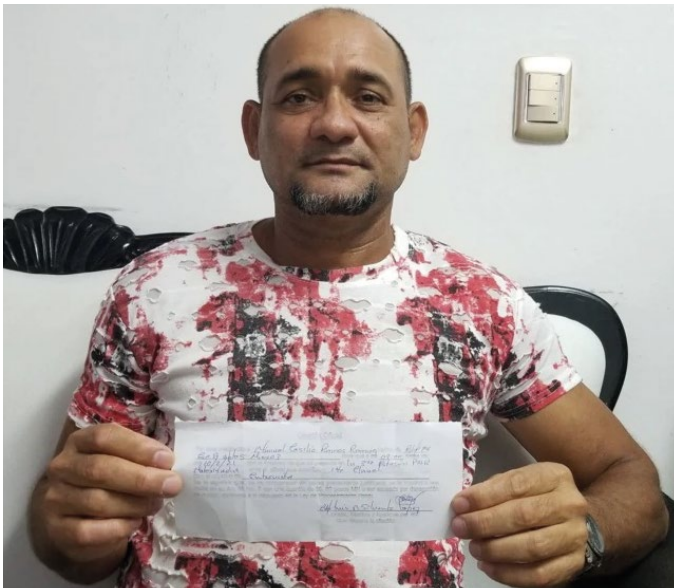
- In response to a viewer’s question in a “Ask Me Anything” video, social media star Erika “Kika” Nieto shared her views on marriage and expressed tolerance for all other views. After an activist complained about the clip, a national court denied her the right to freedom of expression by ordering her to remove the video. Nieto now seeks that the Constitutional Court of Colombia [defend](#) her right to freely share her opinions online.
- The United for Life in Colombia platform denounced the [censorship](#) and attack on pro-life activists by feminist representative Ángela María Robledo of the Green Party, during a public hearing on abortion.
- In the midst of the social crisis in Colombia, the Catholic Church of Colombia indicated that it is willing to be a [mediator](#) between the National Unemployment Committee and the National Government at the required time, since they have had conversations with the Committee to find out their demands and ideas.
- Claretian missionaries have denounced the [military use](#) of one of their facilities located south of Bogotá. The incident occurred on the night of May 4, when several helicopters from the Colombian armed forces landed at the educational institution, during operations in response to the protests taking place at that time in the town.
- According to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, government officials are [unaware](#) of the principle of secularism and violate the fundamental guarantees of cult and religious freedom, and freedom of conscience, when they promote through official messages on their social networks, the identification of the state with a particular religion
- Fathers and religious followers in the city, tired of seeing how people are being massacred, formed the front line, and joined the #ParoNacional. It is called [“First Ecumenical Frontline for Colombia.”](#)





**Source:** "Intimidation and threats against pastor Luis Caviedes for his mission with young protesters", *ALC Comunicación*

- The Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace reported a series of [threats and intimidations](#) against the Methodist pastor Luis Miguel Caviedes Moreno, who has been carrying out his pastoral work to support communities in the framework of the National Strike, in particular the population located in the sector of Siloé in Cali and Paso del Comercio. "Because of his humanitarian work, human rights, peace, and spiritual assistance, he has been the target of monitoring, harassment, and death threats," he confirmed.



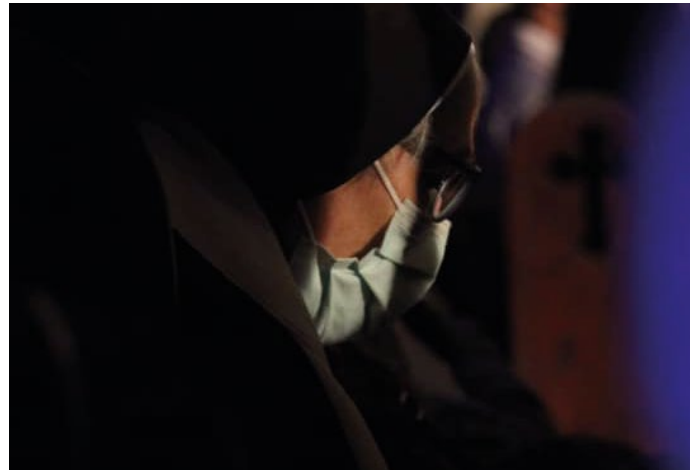
**Source:** "Another evangelical pastor threatened in Cuba for critical comments on social networks", *Radio Televisión Martí*

- The evangelical pastor Manuel Cecilio Ramos Ramírez was [warned](#) this Wednesday by the authorities in Santiago de Cuba not to continue publishing comments criticising the regime on social networks. According to Ramos, with his publications he does not seek to "provoke riots", but only to show the reality of how people live on the island, and he assures that he made this known to State Security agents.
- State Security agents [pressured](#) the wife of Christian journalist Yoe Suárez to "reevaluate" his profession in the independent press, during an interrogation on Monday that officers insisted on presenting as "an affable conversation."
- Rosa María Rodríguez Gil [reported](#) that her grandson Rosuan Durán Melchor, who was unjustly sentenced to 6 years in prison, had been denied parole for the second time. Before being convicted, she was threatened by the police. If she did not leave the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), her grandson would be condemned. To date, they continue to blackmail her, threatening that if she and her daughter Yadells Melchor (Rosuan's mother) continue to be part of the MCL, they will not release her grandson.



**Source:** "Stones are thrown at a church in Las Tunas during a vigil for the situation in Cuba", *Diario de Cuba*

- Numerous stones [were thrown at the roof](#) of the pastoral house and the Missionary Church in Cuba, coordinated by Yoel Demetrio, a known detractor of the Cuban socialist regime in the city of Las Tunas.
- Evangelical leader Marcos Antonio Perdomo was [summoned and interrogated](#) by the National Revolutionary Police (PNR). Perdomo posted photos of himself and almost 20 believers "waiting outside the police building" on his Facebook account after being summoned to be questioned about meetings
- Priest Alberto Reyes, parish priest in the Archdiocese of Camaguey, announced that he will [stop publishing](#) his "Chronicles of the Northwest". The reason is linked to the pressure exerted by the Office of Religious Affairs of the Communist Party of Cuba. The priest is considered by the regime as rebellious and defiant for criticizing the dictatorship and speaking up about the needs of the Cuban people.

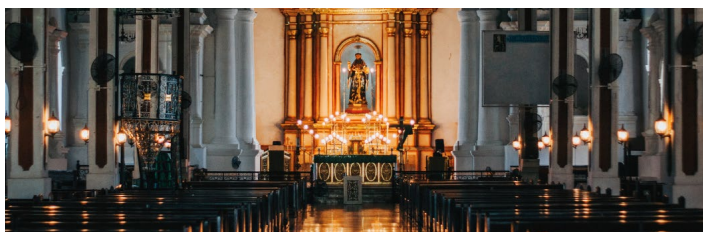


**Source:** Facebook Areopago Cubano: Social Thought with Christian Inspiration

- The director of a home for the elderly of the Catholic Church in Miramar [reported](#) the visit of an inspector of Hygiene and Epidemiology (Ms. Raida), who, after inspecting the entire center, imposed a fine of 2000.00 pesos for arbitrary reasons.
- Pastors of the Iglesia Santidad Pentecostal in San Germán, Holguín, [reported](#) that the municipal police seized 149 table fans from them during an intervention for a false report of the illegal sale of fuel.
- Priest Kenny Fernández was [fined](#) by the municipality of Madruga, in the province of Mayabeque, 3,000 pesos in CUP for apparently putting the health of his parishioners at risk. The priest is known for demonstrating his rejection of the regime during his homilies.
- Two [police summons](#) have been received by the owners of the house where the evangelical pastor Alain Toledano meets with his followers in Santiago de Cuba, since the authorities evicted them from the temple where they congregated. Toledano stated that the regime is trying to close the site so that his church is left without a meeting space.



## CHILE



**Source:** “NGO prepares legal offensive against reduced seating capacity for religious events”, *Comunidad y Justicia*

- Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox Christians, Anglicans, Muslims and Jews [supported](#) the complaint that Movilh presented to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for preventing teacher Sandra Pavez from teaching religion for maintaining a romantic relationship with a person of the same sex.
- After obtaining two rulings from the Supreme Court that recognize mass as an essential activity regulated under the principle of equality, the NGO Comunidad y Justicia is seeking action from different courts of appeals around the country, to [reverse](#) the capacity of five people that the Government set for religious ceremonies in communes in phase 1 (Quarantine) of the “Step by step” plan.
- The Supreme Court [ruled](#) that the legitimate exercise of the fundamental right of freedom of worship of the appellant implies being able to attend Sunday worship in person, so it orders the health authority to establish a system of permits for this purpose, which allows him to move for this purpose, honouring the corresponding maximum capacity in the respective religious ceremony.



## EL SALVADOR

**Source:** “Jesuit priest is threatened in Arcatao for denouncing irregularities in municipal elections”, *Ysuca*

Father Vásquez [claimed](#) that acquaintances told him to “be careful because there are people who are making bad plans against you.” The priest claimed that he is not asking for votes for one political party or the other in Arcatao, but claims that in the electoral process of the municipality the buying and selling of votes took place and there are people who qualify as “good” who are willing to give information about this.





## MÉXICO

- Nine people from two families were [expelled](#) from the Community of Mitzitón. Their five houses were also destroyed in the municipality of San Cristóbal, after not sharing religious beliefs in this area. They were sanctioned, among other things, for not cooperating and supporting activities with Catholic religious purposes.
- The comments issued on various occasions by the Archbishop of Puebla, Víctor Sánchez Espinosa, towards the LGBT community about equal marriage were considered discriminatory by the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (Conapred). The organization issued a [warning](#) against the religious leader.
- Coahuila feminist and human rights organizations denounced the illegal [raid](#) on the house of Jackie Campbell Dávila, communication and human rights advisor to Bishop Emeritus Raúl Vera, who retired last week and is known for his support of neglected people. This is the third assault suffered by the Diocese of Saltillo and Vera's team in less than two months, after Raúl Vera's work office was also robbed on December 9 and 21.



**Source:** "Evangelicals expelled for religious intolerance in Mitzitón", *El Heraldo de Chiapas*

- The Feminist Network of Quintana Roo reported that they filed [complaints](#) with the State Attorney General's Office (FGE) against Bishop Pedro Pablo Elizondo and against citizen Gabriela Santana, for alleged acts of discrimination and other crimes.
- The Network for the Secular Republic called for [maintaining secularism](#) and "guaranteeing that the separation of ministers of worship from political proselytism is maintained." Trying to nominate ministers of worship for elective positions, as was the case with Fuerza por México, does not benefit "the preservation of the secular state built in Mexico since the 19th century."
- The president of the Evangelical Ministerial Alliance of Pastors (Ame) of Tijuana pointed out that different evangelical Christian churches in the Cárdenas neighborhood and the East Zone of Tijuana have suffered [theft, extortion and collection of fees](#), a situation that was aggravated by the Covid 19 pandemic.



EL VOTO ES  
LIBRE Y  
SECRETO



**Source:** "Church calls to vote and "leave aside" those who have not fulfilled their commitment to serve Mexicans", *Animal Político*

- The INE's Complaints and Complaints Commission ordered the [removal](#) of a video of Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, in which he calls to vote against whoever governs. Unanimously, the commission issued the precautionary measure, since by law it contravenes the constitutional and legal regime that establishes the principle of secularism, the separation of Church-State, as well as the prohibition that ministers of religious worship carry out proselytizing acts for or against a certain political force.
- According to the [Technical Guidelines](#) for the Care of Safe Abortion in Mexico, although its exercise is limited to health personnel who intervene directly in the interruption of pregnancy, conscientious objection should not be argued to deny or delay health care and the provision of information and reference to which people are entitled, otherwise professional liability may be incurred.
- Elsa Méndez, Local Representative for District 6 of the state of Querétaro in Mexico, has suffered [political and judicial persecution](#). As of today, she has 15 investigation folders at the State Attorney's Office where she is accused of the crime of "discrimination" based on her speeches and initiatives that defend life and the family. This could be the first case in the history of Mexico in which political persecution by supporters of sexual minorities has legal impacts on defenders of life.





## NICARAGUA



**Source:** "Two Franciscan friars banned from entering the country "for denouncing injustice", *Confidencial*

- The National University Council (CNU) [reduced](#) the 2021 budget for the Catholic University of the Dry Tropic (Ucatse) in Estelí by 20 million cordobas. The rector is Monsignor Juan Abelardo Mata, bishop of the Estelí diocese and an outspoken critic of the Government of Daniel Ortega.
- In less than fifteen days, the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners (DGME), [denied entry](#) to Nicaragua to two Franciscan friars of Salvadoran origin who had been residing and fulfilling their priestly service in Nicaragua for years. The authorities did not explain the reasons for the entry obstruction to the Franciscans, but one of the affected priests believes that it is related to the allegations of injustice and human rights violations made by the Church.
- A mob of women, Sandinista fanatics, [broke](#) into El Rosario Church in Chinandega, while self-convened organizations offered a tribute to those murdered by the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. After interrupting the reading of a proclamation in honour of the victims, the mobs began to shout slogans in support of the dictator.
- The Nicaraguan Government [suspended](#) the residence of Italian Fray Damián Muratori, known for promoting the canonization of "Servant of God" Odorico D'Andrea, for allegedly participating in protests against President Daniel Ortega, and granted him 90 days to leave the country.





**Source:** "Nicaragua: Catholic Church unbowed on anniversary of protests", *Voz de América*

- Vice President Rosario Murillo [threatened](#) the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. She called Catholic leaders "ridiculous" and accused them of approving "theft and robbery", as well as receiving funds for "death".
- Dictator Daniel Ortega [attacked](#) the Catholic Church in the midst of the repressive rise against opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, businessmen and even against the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. Ortega called the followers "Pharisees" and accused them of "blessing" the 2018 protesters, whom they have described as "coup plotters" and "terrorists."
- The Sandinista deputy Wilfredo Navarro [threatened](#) to accuse the Catholic Church in Nicaragua of an electoral crime for the statement issued by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Managua for stating that "Nicaraguans prevented from voting" and that "there are no conditions for elections".



**Source:** "Archbishopric of Lima: churches will remain closed during focused quarantine", *El Comercio*

- The Peruvian Episcopal Conference (CEP) sent a letter to the President of the Republic, Francisco Sagasti, asking him to [intervene and correct](#) the "excessive limitation" of the capacity for churches, established to face the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The president of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference (CEP), Miguel Cabrejos, expressed in a message to the newspaper La República ["concern and indignation"](#) over the drawing of the virgin in an offensive caricature.





---

*For the report of other cases/news, contact  
us at [info@olire.org](mailto:info@olire.org) or enter our [online form](#)*

---



OBSERVATORY OF  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
IN LATIN AMERICA