

Table of Contents

- ***PANAMA, the cradle of the fourth edition of the Faith and Freedom Summit. Why?***
 - ***Panama will host the Fourth Edition of the Faith and Freedom Summit***
-

PANAMA, the cradle of the fourth edition of the Faith and Freedom Summit. Why?

Panama, a reference for its successful accommodation of the de facto religious diversity and the peaceful coexistence between historical, tribal and new religions

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

[The European Times](#) (24.09.2024) - This year, the '[Faith and Freedom Summit](#)' organized by civil society organizations of Europe and America is taking place in Panama, a small country of 4.4 inhabitants in Central America.

While the last summit was hosted in the European Parliament in Brussels, it is [the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament](#) (Parlatino), comprising 23 countries, which this year is opening its doors on 24-25 September to this prestigious event gathering more than 40 speakers: prominent academics, human rights defenders, religious and political leaders from Panama, Germany, Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Spain, the United States, France, Holland, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

The Kingpin of this project is Giselle Lima, Co-Coordinator of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable of Panama.

Why a conference on freedom of religion or belief in Panama?

Panama has been specifically chosen for this international meeting because the fundamental principles of freedom of religion or belief established by the United Nations are met by Panama. Its Constitution and its laws have led to good practices that can be shown with pride to other big democracies in America and Europe which have not achieved the same level of harmonious coexistence between the state on the one hand and the full range of religious or belief communities on the other hand.

In Panama, a country which is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, everybody has the right to change his religion or belief. Freedom of association, of worship and of assembly is respected. Freedom of expression and of sharing one's faith in the public space is unimpeded. As the country has no army, there is no military service, which is especially important for Jehovah's Witnesses.

Relations are harmonious between society and religions as well as between the various religions. No inter-religious conflicts, no campaigns inciting hostility or hatred against specific religious or belief minority groups. Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists and other religious minorities are treated fairly in the media, which is not always the case in big democracies.

Panama's modesty needed to be rewarded by a big international event. The Faith and Freedom Summit is doing it.

Statistical data

In a 2022 Panama National Institute of Statistics and Census survey,
65 percent of respondents identified as Catholic;
22 percent as Evangelical;
6 percent as having no religion;
4 percent as "other religion."

Jewish leaders estimate their community at 15,000 members, centered largely in Panama City.

A Shia Muslim leader estimated the Muslim community (Shia and Sunni) amounts to 14,000, with most Muslims located in Panama City, Colon, and Penonome. Shia Muslims are primarily of Lebanese origin, and Sunni Muslims are primarily of other Arab and Pakistani origin.

Other groups making up less than 5 percent of the population include (in descending order of membership) Episcopalians, Baha'is, Buddhists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Rastafarians.

Other small religious groups, found primarily in Panama City and other large urban areas, include Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

(Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Pentecostals, Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Church of Scientology, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Local religious leaders estimated only a few individuals are Babalaos, who follow the Yoruba religious tradition and are associated with Cuba's Santeria religion.

Indigenous communities are home to numerous Indigenous religions, including Ibeorgun (prevalent among Guna Panamanians), Mama Tata and Mama Chi (prevalent among Ngabe-Bugle Panamanians), and Embera (prevalent among the Embera Panamanians).

Adherents of these religions live across the country, which complicates efforts to estimate their numbers. Indigenous representatives estimate the practitioners of Mama Tata and Mama Chi number in the tens of thousands, whereas the practitioners of Ibeorgun and Embera likely number in the thousands.

Panama will host the Fourth Edition of the Faith and Freedom Summit

UN speakers, governments, academia, media and civil society will participate

See the program in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#)

[Economic Panorama Panama](#) (22.09.2024) - As published by the well-known digital newspaper '[Panoráma Económico Panama](#)', the most read digital news of Panama, the Parlatino will host this week the 4th edition of the prestigious '[Faith and Freedom Summit](#)'. After noting the growing violations of freedom of belief in many parts of the world, more than 40 speakers from Panama, Germany, Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Spain, the United States, France, Holland, Mexico, the United Kingdom and others will address for 2 intense days the problems and good practices in the protection of the right to freedom of belief in the world.

The Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (Parlatino) in Panama City has been the chosen stage for the International Summit "Faith and Freedom" (*) on September 24 and 25, 2024. This event, under the appropriate slogan "Practicing what we preach", will bring together in two days more than 40 prominent academics, human rights defenders, religious and political leaders from various regions of the world.

The event will address the promotion and defense of freedom of conscience. Ambassadors from various countries of the world have confirmed their participation as well as the Nunciature and public officials and the legislative branch.

The strategic partners that have supported the Faith and Freedom Summit IV have been the Parlatino, the National Bar Association of Panama, the European Religions Initiative, the Santa María La Antigua Catholic University (USMA), the International Center for Law and Religion Studies and the international campaign "What is Freedom of Religion?".

The summit has broad global support from international organizations, academia, civil society and religious entities, and will feature a special message from Dr. Nazila Ghanea, current United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief, who will emphasize the global importance of protecting this fundamental human right.

The opening ceremony will feature the intervention of

- Elías Castillo, Executive Secretary of the Parlatino;
- His Excellency Juan Francisco Borrell Cal, Deputy Minister of Government of the Republic of Panama;
- His Excellency Mr. D. Rubén Farje, Representative in Panama of the Organization of American States;
- Mrs. Maricarmen Plata Secretary of Access to Rights and Equity Organization of American States;

as well as a founding member of the Coalition of NGOs Faith and Freedom Summit;

and will have as Master of Ceremonies the Coordinator of the International Religious Freedom Table in Panama. (*)

Started as a European campaign by a coalition of secular and faith-based non-governmental organizations from the European Union, the **"Faith and Freedom" Summit** has gained international momentum with organizations from all corners of the world. Since its inception in 2018, it has managed to bring together stakeholders from various parts of the world with a common goal: to unite forces and resources to end discrimination and defend freedom of religion and belief, so that everyone can believe, not believe or change beliefs everywhere in the world and at all times.

Throughout its three previous editions, which were held in the European Parliament, the summit has served as a platform to promote dialogue between politicians, academics, religious and civil society, to promote non-discrimination policies and to strengthen the legislative mechanisms for the protection of human rights at regional and international levels.

Titles of the program panels

The event program includes panel discussions focused on:

- Mechanisms to promote and protect freedom of belief within nations and regions.
- The role of the academy in the defense of religious freedom.
- Religions and interreligious work to protect the freedom of others.
- The importance of civil society participation in promoting freedom of belief.
- Responsibility of the media on the promotion and respect of freedom of belief. (**)
- Achieving freedom of belief for all through diplomacy.

An International Call to Action

The summit invites political leaders, civil society organizations and citizens from around the world to unite in defense of freedom of conscience and religion. It is urged to sign a commitment that rejects intolerance, discrimination, harassment and violence, in order to build a more equitable society that respects the diversity of beliefs.

HRWF Footnote

(*) The local organizer of the conference is Giselle Lima, Co-Coordinator of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable of Panama

(**) *Human Rights Without Frontiers* will present a paper titled "**Religious minorities in the eye of media cyclones**" in the Session "Media Responsibility on the Promotion and Respect of FoRB".
