

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

As part of its overall policy to promote human rights, the U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 50 percent Roman Catholic, 35 percent Protestant (including evangelicals), 5 percent Kimbanguist (a Christian-inspired Congolese church), and 5 percent Muslim. Other religious groups are represented in much smaller numbers and include Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews. The remainder generally practices animist indigenous religious beliefs. Best estimates indicate that approximately 70 percent of the population attends religious services each week, but the last population census providing specific proportions was conducted in 1984.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims are concentrated mainly in the provinces of Maniema, Orientale, and Kinshasa. Although present throughout the country, Kimbanguists are primarily concentrated in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

A statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utilities provides for and regulates the establishment and operation of religious institutions. The law grants the government the power to recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. The government grants tax-exempt status to recognized religious organizations. The law requires officially recognized religious associations to maintain nonprofit status and respect the general public order. It also permits the establishment of places of worship and the training of clergy.

A 2001 decree requires nonprofit organizations, including religious organizations, to register with the government by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. The government requires foreign religious groups to obtain the approval of the president through the minister of justice.

The government observes Christmas as a national holiday.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. Despite the requirement that religious groups be registered with the government, unregistered religious groups operated unhindered and foreign religious groups generally operated without restriction once they received approval from the government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Nevertheless, there continued to be credible reports that persons, including children, accused of witchcraft were attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes. In this context, “witch” is an imprecise term that is often applied to persons with developmental, behavioral, or psychological problems and it does not refer to those persons who practice witchcraft as a religion. Across the country, there was a common belief that some persons have the power to cast spells on others or can be possessed by demons. Persecution of these individuals is common following a death that family members attribute to the work of a witch. Accusations of witchcraft can cause widespread fear in a community.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with major religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and their relations with the government and with the U.S. government. Through the Access English micro-scholarship program, the U.S. government provided English language training to students in religious schools in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi.

On August 30, the embassy co-hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) with national Islamic organizations. Approximately 75 people attended the event, including Muslims from the local and international communities, government officials, and non-Muslim diplomats. The U.S. ambassador and Imam Cheikh Abdallah Mangala Luaba delivered remarks focused on fostering a continuing partnership and a shared future.