

SEYCHELLES

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

In its various engagements with senior government officials, the U.S. government regularly discussed the rights of religious groups, including their right to disseminate their messages and in particular to obtain radio licenses. The U.S. government does not maintain a permanent diplomatic presence in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The 2010 census indicated approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent Anglican. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hindus, Muslims, and Baha'is are present in small numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, along with mosques and the Baha'i local spiritual assembly, are recognized by individual acts of incorporation. Other churches that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar of Associations. In order to receive tax privileges, religious bodies must also register with the Ministry of Finance. The Registrar of Associations, as the regulating body for both religious and secular associations, recognizes 54 religious associations.

The government provides broadcast time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. The Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation reviews and approves the editorial content of pre-recorded messages and prohibits live broadcasts of all religious programming, except for selected services on alternate Sundays.

An amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prohibits political parties and religious groups from obtaining radio licenses. The amendment was under legal challenge before the Court of Appeal at the end of the year.

Government employees of all religious backgrounds can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and the government usually granted such requests. The Islamic Society of Seychelles generally submits requests to the Department of Public Administration for Muslim employees in both the public and private sectors to receive leave on Islamic festival days.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners or detainees.

The government broadcaster reserved the right to edit pre-recorded prayer services to fit within required time slots, and to assure that "hate speech" was not broadcast. Nonetheless, on alternate Sunday mornings, the national radio service permits the live broadcast of full Catholic masses and Anglican services, lasting up to 90 minutes. The government also allows Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i and Seventh-day Adventist groups 15-minute pre-recorded prayer broadcasts, as well as additional time for pre-recorded Catholic and Anglican prayer broadcasts, on a fortnightly basis.

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. There was general respect in the society for diverse religious affiliations, beliefs, and practices.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In its various engagements with senior government officials, the U.S. government advocated for the rights of religious groups to disseminate their messages, and in particular, discussed the right for religious groups to obtain radio licenses. There were no reports of limitations or restrictions on religious freedom in Seychelles. The U.S. embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius, monitors religious freedom and human rights issues in the Seychelles since there is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence there.