

WESTERN SAHARA

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom but, in practice, the government restricted religious freedom in some cases. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

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

The U.S. ambassador and senior administration officials discussed religious freedom with the government of Morocco within the context of official visits and the annual bilateral human rights dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

A majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, the veneration of religious figures and the tombs in which they are believed to be interred. There is a small group of Catholics who live and worship freely.

There is a small foreign community working for the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Many of its members are non-Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, but, in practice, the government restricts religious freedom in some cases. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Moroccan law prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims who adhere to the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam. Conversion from Islam is discouraged but not explicitly prohibited.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government, through the U.S. embassy in Morocco, discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador and senior administration officials discussed religious freedom with the government of Morocco within the context of official visits and the annual bilateral human rights dialogue.