

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom in interactions with the government and civil society.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is four million, according to government estimates. A 2010 government report estimates over 80 percent is Christian, of which an estimated 40 percent is Roman Catholic, 51 percent Protestant, and the remaining Kimbanguist (a Christian-inspired Congolese faith), Salvationist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Approximately 28 percent of Protestants are evangelical. An estimated 11 percent of the population is atheist, and 2 percent is Muslim. The remainder includes other unspecified religious groups. A significant portion of the population combines traditional beliefs and practices with Christianity and other religious beliefs. There are an estimated 726,000 Muslim foreign migrant workers and 180 mosques, serving both citizens and migrant workers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution specifically forbids discrimination based on religion. All organizations, including religious groups, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the government. There

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were no reports of discrimination against religious groups when applying for registration; however, the process was time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation of foreigners.

Public schools do not teach religion; however, private religious schools devote class time to religious studies.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Although religious groups must register for accreditation, there were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process. However, one leader of an evangelical Christian church reported that the accreditation process for his church took 18 months, while the same process for political parties aligned with the government was reportedly much faster.

The government granted Christians and Muslims access to public facilities for religious worship in connection with Christmas and Ramadan.

The government did not observe Islamic holy days nationally, but granted leave to Muslim employees for observation of religious holidays and encouraged other employers to do the same. Employers typically granted leave for those who wished to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Ecumenical Council, the Islamic Council, and the Revivalist Council each met at least twice during the year. The leaders of these councils convened an interfaith committee on an ad hoc basis to respond to issues of joint concern. The committee met to pay tribute to those who died in munitions explosions on March 4.

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Adherents of each faith lived together peacefully in urban areas.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom in interactions with the government and civil society. In November embassy officials met separately with leaders of evangelical, Catholic, and Islamic groups to discuss the state of religious tolerance and cooperation, and to reaffirm the U.S. government's dedication to religious freedom. Regular embassy consultations with religious leaders, refugees, and prisoners served as opportunities to advocate for the freedom to practice one's religion.