

LESOTHO 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.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2006 census, the population is 1.88 million. Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. There are an estimated 4,000 Muslim families, 150 Hindu families, and 800 Bahais, which combine to make up approximately 1 percent of the population. The remaining 9 percent of the population belongs to indigenous religious groups, although exact figures are difficult to determine. Many Christians practice traditional rituals in conjunction with Christianity. Muslim and Hindu numbers are declining due to emigration to South Africa. Although there are a small number of Jews, there is no synagogue for worship; services are held across the border in South Africa. Muslims live primarily in the northern area of the country.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa, South Asia, and China constitute less than 1 percent of the population. No statistics are available on their religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution states that "Every person shall be entitled to, and (except with his own consent) shall not be hindered in his enjoyment of, freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public

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and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”

The government has no established requirements for religious group recognition. By law, any group may register with the government, regardless of its purpose. The requirements for registration are a constitution and a leadership committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for not registering.

The education ministry pays and certifies all teachers, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and religious schools. Churches own and operate nearly 90 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Catholic Church operates an estimated 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church also operate schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

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. Mutual respect among all religious groups was the norm; various ecumenical efforts promoted cooperation on social matters.

A local privately-owned radio station made several calls for inclusion of Christianity in the constitution. One political party, now part of the coalition government, agreed in principle to this proposal during its pre-May 2012 general election campaign. However, the new coalition government made no move to amend the constitution.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.