

SEYCHELLES 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 in Port Louis, Mauritius, monitors religious freedom issues in the Seychelles, where there is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence. In its engagements with senior government officials, non-resident U.S. embassy representatives regularly discussed the rights of religious groups, including their right to disseminate messages and in particular to obtain radio licenses.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2010 census, the population is 90,900. Approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is 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 Bahais 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 government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, mosques, and the Bahai local spiritual assembly 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 finance ministry. As the regulating body for both religious and secular associations, the Registrar of Associations recognizes 54 religious associations. A minimum of seven members is required in order to register an association and the process is straightforward.

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The government provides broadcast time to religious groups 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, with the exception of 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 year's end.

The government typically grants the requests of government employees of all religious backgrounds for paid leave on any of their holy days. 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; however, the government imposed a restriction that affected members of religious groups.

The government broadcaster reserved the right to edit pre-recorded prayer services to fit within required time slots and to ensure that "hate speech" was not broadcast. On alternate Sunday mornings, the national radio service permitted the live broadcast of full Catholic masses and Anglican services, lasting up to 90 minutes. The government also allowed Muslim, Hindu, Bahai and Seventh-day Adventist groups 15-minute pre-recorded prayer broadcasts, as well as additional time for pre-recorded Catholic and Anglican prayer broadcasts every two weeks.

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.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius, monitors religious freedom issues in the Seychelles, where there is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence. Embassy representative travelled regularly to the country to meet with government officials. They raised the importance of the rights of religious groups to disseminate their messages and, in particular, discussed the desire of religious groups to apply for radio licenses.