

ZAMBIA 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 reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders, however, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the leaders of all major religious groups, the diplomatic community, and government officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2010 census, the population is 13.1 million. Approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent is Muslim or Hindu, and 12 percent adhere to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Many people combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in Lusaka and in the Eastern and Copperbelt provinces; many are immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired Zambian citizenship. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim. Most Hindus are of South Asian descent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution declares Christianity the official religion of the country, while upholding the right of all persons to enjoy freedom of conscience or religion. The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion for all citizens; freedom to change religion or belief; and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other laws address religious freedom violations.

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Religious groups must register with the registrar of societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs and pay regular statutory fees. To apply, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and display general compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. The government may subject unregistered religious groups to fines and imprison group members for up to seven years.

The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine. Religious education after grade nine is optional, although not all schools offer it.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom; however, the government imposed restrictions that affected members of religious groups.

In July the government deported a Catholic priest to his native Rwanda on the grounds that a sermon he delivered, in which he criticized government agricultural policies, might incite anti-government uprisings. The government revoked the deportation order in November due to pressure from civil society groups and the Catholic Church.

In October the chief registrar of societies announced that he would revoke the registration of all religious groups and communities taking an active role in politics, although he had not done so by year's end. The law does not allow revocation of registration on that basis. In June the registrar threatened to revoke the registration of religious groups, churches, mosques, community organizations, and other similar societies for failing to pay their fees. On October 11, the chief registrar revoked the registration of the Independent Church of Zambia (ICOZ) for non-payment of fees.

In August the registrar revoked the registration of the Mount Zion Spiritual Church in Zambia because police arrested its bishop in connection with the killing of a college student. By law, the registrar may revoke the registration of a group for a number of reasons, but criminal involvement of one member is not among them.

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Although all religious leaders were relatively comfortable with religious freedom provisions in the existing constitution, some expressed concern that ongoing constitutional reform discussions retained emphasis on Zambia as a Christian nation.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders, however, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In September residents of Chambishi in Copperbelt province burned to death four persons suspected of Satanism. Subsequent clashes between residents and police attempting to restore order resulted in several injuries. Police arrested several people whose trials continued at year's end. Government and religious leaders condemned the killings, called for calm, and called on police to arrest culprits. The government also criticized the police for neglecting warning signs before the murders. The government did not make public its investigation of police conduct.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and to discuss national concerns.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with religious leaders, the diplomatic corps, and government officials.

Embassy officials met with religious leaders to discuss how ongoing constitutional reform would affect religious freedom. On August 9, the ambassador hosted an iftar for representatives of the Islamic Supreme Council, the diplomatic corps, and members of the Muslim community within the U.S. mission.