

MADAGASCAR 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws protect religious freedom. The de facto regime harassed and restricted the activities of a Christian group closely tied to the country's ousted president and of organizations affiliated with that group. The regime required permits for all public demonstrations, including acts of outdoor worship by religious groups. Muslims stated that their ethnic and religious affiliation sometimes limited their access to government services and financial assistance.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government does not recognize the current de facto regime. The U.S. embassy supported religious freedom by speaking out publicly when the de facto regime imposed restrictions on religious leaders and by actively engaging with religious leaders. U.S. officials encouraged all interlocutors to respect religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 22.6 million (July 2013 estimate). Although neither precise nor official figures are available, religious groups report that approximately half of the population is Christian.

The four principal Christian groups are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians (the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar – FJKM). Smaller groups include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and other local evangelical denominations.

Local sources report that the most numerous among non-Christian groups are adherents of indigenous religions, although the number is unknown. A local academic estimates Muslims constitute 10-15 percent of the population. According to religious leaders, Muslims are largely concentrated in the north, northwest, and southeast. Citizens of ethnic Indian and Pakistani descent and Comoran immigrants represent the majority of Muslims.

There are small numbers of Hindus and Jews across the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The law protects this right against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The law requires religious groups to register with the interior ministry, although these provisions are not always enforced. Registration confers the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other gifts. To qualify for registration, a group must have at least 100 members and an elected administrative council of no more than nine members, each of whom must be a citizen.

Groups failing to meet the registration requirements for religious groups may register as “simple associations.” Simple associations may not receive gifts or hold religious services. The law limits them to conducting social projects. Groups engaging in additional activities are subject to legal action. If a group’s leadership and members are foreign, it may form an association “reputed to be foreign.” Such foreign associations may only receive temporary authorizations, subject to periodic renewal and other conditions.

Government Practices

The unelected de facto regime, which assumed power with military support in 2009, often subjected members of the FJKM to harassment and restrictions. Because of the FJKM’s close association with ousted president Marc Ravalomanana, it was difficult to classify these restrictions specifically as instances of religious intolerance.

FJKM-sponsored Radio Fahazavana remained off the air. The de facto regime indefinitely postponed FJKM-sponsored legal actions to reopen the station, although at year’s end the FJKM was still actively trying to reopen it.

The de facto regime required a permit for all public demonstrations, including religious acts such as outdoor worship services. While most religious groups routinely received such authorization, the de facto regime permitted the FJKM-associated Ecclesiastic Movement (HMF) to hold public worship services only on

four occasions. Authorities also prohibited the HMF from holding outdoor public worship services on church property. The de facto regime prevented the FJKM from holding worship services in large public spaces, such as stadiums and sports complexes, which were often used for campaigning during the electoral season. The de facto regime, however, allowed the Catholic Church to hold a large public worship ceremony at the coliseum on October 20, just days before the first round of presidential elections.

Muslim leaders estimated up to 5 percent of Muslims did not have citizenship, despite being born in the country and having longstanding family ties, because the law restricted citizenship to children of two Malagasy citizens. Other Muslim leaders stated that their ethnic and religious affiliation sometimes limited their access to government services and financial assistance. Muslims reported that access to basic administrative services, such as obtaining a national identification card, was often a more complicated and bureaucratic endeavor for citizens with Muslim-sounding names. Individuals attempting to register names of non-profit organizations containing Arabic words also reported difficulties.

The Ministry of Interior registered 24 new religious groups during the year, for a total of approximately 160 officially registered groups. According to media reports, however, many religious groups continued to operate without official recognition.

State-run Malagasy National Television (TVM) provided free broadcasting only to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to the four churches belonging to the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar (FFKM, representing Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians) on Sundays, and to the Islamic community once a week. During Ramadan the Islamic community was able to purchase additional airtime.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because political affiliation and religion were often linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as cases of political or religious intolerance. The media did not report discrimination based on religious affiliation during the year.

Members of the Muslim community reported that some women's associations excluded Muslim women who were active members of civil society. In other

cases, Muslims who rented property reported that landlords harassed them because of their religion.

The Muslim community actively engaged in religious dialogue with leaders of other religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government does not recognize the de facto regime. The embassy had limited interaction with the regime and its representatives.

U.S. embassy officials engaged regularly with civil society and religious leaders on matters relating to religious freedom. In meetings with Malagasy officials, embassy representatives encouraged respect for religious freedom and reiterated that the de facto regime should not harass religious leaders for their religious or political affiliation. On several occasions U.S. officials also met with religious leaders and heard their concerns regarding the closure of Radio Fahazavana.

The embassy continued to intervene in the case of a local FJKM-affiliated association in Mahajanga that authorities had attempted to evict from the building where it was conducting its community-based activities. In July embassy officials highlighted to regional authorities that contractual arrangements allowed the organization to perform its religious activities at that location. At year's end the case was still pending with regional de facto authorities.

In August the embassy organized a Ramadan food drive, benefiting some of Antananarivo's most disadvantaged women and highlighting ties with the Muslim community. Embassy participation conveyed a message of U.S support for religious tolerance for minority religious groups.