

UGANDA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The government continued to impose restrictions on minority religious groups it defined as “cults.” The government arrested, before releasing without charge, 12 members of a “cult” religion. The government also imposed restrictions on religious groups on the grounds that individuals posed security risks. For example, the government closed 10 madrassahs on suspicion they were being used as recruitment centers for terrorist groups. The government also detained, and continued to hold without charge, 11 sheikhs.

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

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government, and maintained strong relationships with religious leaders. The embassy sponsored Muslim community events to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 34.8 million (July 2013 estimate). According to government data, 85 percent is Christian, 12 percent Muslim, and 3 percent Hindu, Jewish, or Bahai or adheres to indigenous beliefs. Among Christians, 42 percent are Roman Catholics, 36 percent Anglicans, 15 percent Pentecostal or Orthodox Christians, and 7 percent members of evangelical groups. The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Indigenous religious groups practice in rural areas. Nationals of Indian origin or descent are the most significant non-African ethnic population and are primarily Shia Muslim or Hindu. There is a small indigenous Jewish community near the eastern town of Mbale.

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 prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion.

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The government requires religious groups to register to obtain legal entity status. Larger groups, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Anglican Church, and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, obtain legal status by registering under the Trustees Incorporation Act (TIA). The Ministry of Internal Affairs' nongovernmental organization (NGO) board registers smaller local religious groups, including evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Registration with the NGO board allows groups to access donor funding. The NGO board requires re-registration 12 months after the first registration issuance, 36 months after the second issuance, and 60 months after the most recent issuance for subsequent renewals. Religious organizations established under the TIA need not restrict themselves to the provisions of voluntary services, unlike those registered with the NGO board. In addition, groups registered with the NGO board are subject to significantly greater state control and oversight than those incorporated under the TIA. The penalty for nonregistration is closure of the organization.

In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum surveys world religious beliefs. Private schools are free to offer religious instruction.

Government Practices

The government imposed restrictions on minority religious groups it defined as “cults.” The government defined a “cult” as a system of religious worship, often with a charismatic leader, which indoctrinated members with “unorthodox or extremist” views, practices, or beliefs.

On September 11, police in Kabale arrested and later released without charges 12 suspected members of a “cult” religion (not otherwise identified), including their leader, Prossy Turinawe, for operating an illegal organization. The police advised the suspects to register their organization with the government.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of government denial of legal status to religious groups applying for registration. On April 13, however, authorities in Mityana District closed an unregistered group, Nazareth Ministries, for allegedly carrying out “cult” activities and operating an illegal organization.

Authorities investigated suspected “cult” groups that frustrated delivery of government services. For example, in November district officials in Lwengo started investigations into the activities of 666, a religious “cult” allegedly barring followers from using free treated mosquito nets or taking their children to

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government schools or hospitals. By year's end there were no reports of the government's findings.

Between March and July authorities closed 10 madrassahs located in various districts, including Mukono, Masaka, and Mbarara, on suspicion of the schools being used as recruiting or training centers for terrorist groups. The authorities stated the schools failed to meet national education standards and were unhygienic. Police also said most of the centers were unregistered and raised "national security concerns." Objecting to the closures, some Muslim activists complained authorities were denying Islamic religious instruction. In April the Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly (UMYA) filed suit against the government for the closures, but by year's end there had been no developments in the case.

The UMYA also protested the government's detention of 11 sheikhs, who were not officially charged with any offenses, and called on the government to investigate the murders of four Islamic leaders in 2012. By year's end, there had been no arrests of any murder suspects.

As in the previous year, the government continued to refuse to register the New Malta Jerusalem Church based in Agago District, citing "security reasons."

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

On April 28, four pastors and six followers of His Voice Assembly, an evangelical church, were accused of burning nine shrines belonging to families that subscribe to traditional African religions in Luuka District. On April 29, Sanyu Moses, a member of an aggrieved family, filed a complaint with the police alleging the pastors maliciously damaged property and violated the families' freedom of religion. The police arrested 10 members of the church, including the leader, Pastor Esther Lovisa. Following questioning of the suspects, the police determined the dispute was a family matter and advised the detainees to resolve the issue amicably, releasing them on the same day.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of incidents of bans on wearing veils or hijabs.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and worked closely with religious leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance and freedom.

The embassy reached out to Muslim audiences with programs, grants, and press interactions. Embassy outreach programs promoted religious tolerance and freedom throughout the year, including on August 15, when the embassy provided food to Kampala's main mosques during Ramadan. On August 16, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted 70 influential Muslims for an iftar to promote mutual interest and respect. These activities created opportunities for dialogue with Muslims about problems of tolerance and extremism.

The embassy actively engaged with the local chapter of a Department of State-sponsored international network of Muslim youth leaders to promote an interfaith dialogue and messages of peace.