

ZIMBABWE 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others. The government provided police support to a religious leader closely allied with the ruling party when he visited the shrine of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church in Budiro and attempted to ban the group, which was accused of committing abuses against women and children. The government arrested and charged members of the apostolic group in Budiro after clashes with police. The detainees, later released on bail, accused the police of torturing them while in custody. A court sentenced four group members to four-year prison terms while acquitting 26 others. Several days after the clash, police led a crowd in attacking and destroying the apostolic group's Budiro shrine.

In late June individuals reported to be supporters of the ruling party destroyed the homes of four leaders of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church in Gomo. As in the previous year, some Christian groups blamed indigenous Christian groups, particularly the apostolic community in Marange, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging polygamy with young girls.

The U.S. embassy engaged government officials, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.7 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), 84 percent of the population is Christian. The EFZ's 2004 census estimates the Christian population is 33 percent Catholic; 42 percent evangelical or Pentecostal; 17 percent Anglican, Methodist, or Presbyterian; and 8 percent Apostolic. There are a significant number of independent Pentecostal and syncretic African churches.

The majority of the population also adheres to indigenous religions. Religious leaders reported a continued increase in observance of indigenous religious

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practices, often simultaneously with Christianity. Approximately 14 percent of the population adheres solely to indigenous religious beliefs.

Approximately 3 percent of the population is Muslim, primarily immigrants of Indian, Mozambican, and Malawian descent. The Muslim population is concentrated in rural areas and in some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers (predominately Indian-Zimbabwean professionals and business people) living in upper-middle class suburban neighborhoods. Small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais together make up less than 1 percent of the population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious belief and provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others. It recognizes the right of prisoners to communicate with and receive visits by their chosen religious counselor.

The 2002 Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association. While POSA exempts religious activities and events, the government has categorized as political any public gathering, including religious gatherings, critical of the ruling party.

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department, which generally grants these requests.

The education ministry sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on Christian religious groups but covering other religious groups, emphasizing religious tolerance. Religious education is generally optional in secondary schools. The government does not regulate religious education in private schools but approves employment of headmasters and teachers.

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Government Practices

On May 30, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) escorted Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe President Archbishop Johannes Ndanga, who was closely aligned with the ruling party, to the shrine of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church in Budiriro, a Harare suburb. Despite having unclear legal authority, Ndanga pronounced the group banned, charging it had committed abuses against women and children. Some worshippers at the shrine responded violently, assaulting ZRP officers and journalists, who fled the area. ZRP officers returned later that day, arresting group members as suspected perpetrators of the attacks on police and others. On June 2, media recorded ZRP officers leading ruling party supporters, some wearing clothing with party symbols and slogans, in attacking and destroying the shrine. Media also reported authorities arrested at least 24 group members, detaining them for nearly two weeks before releasing each of them on \$100 bail June 12. After their release, members alleged police had tortured them while in custody. On November 12, the magistrate's court found 11 members guilty of assault and sentenced them to four years in prison. The judge acquitted 26 members for lack of evidence.

In contrast to the previous year, there were no reports the government used security laws to target public events and prayer rallies of religious groups. There were reports from religious and civil society groups of government monitoring or harassment of religiously-affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and their members who criticized the government. Instances included surveillance of NGO events by security officials, denial of police permission to hold public events, and investigations into whether organizations were compliant with complex registration requirements.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included non-denominational Christian prayers.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Following the destruction of the shrine of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church in Budiriro, individuals who reportedly were supporters of the ruling political party destroyed the homes of four leaders of the apostolic group in Gomo village during the week of June 23. Police made no arrests following the incident.

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As in the previous year, some Christian groups blamed indigenous Christian groups, particularly the apostolic community in Marange, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging polygamy with young girls.

Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist religious groups continued to build and operate primary and secondary schools. The United Methodist, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches all operated private universities. Christian schools, the majority of which were Catholic, constituted one-third of all schools. Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish groups operated primary and secondary schools in major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo. Many private religious schools included students from different faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives raised the issue of religious freedom with government officials through diplomatic notes and met with religious leaders and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in Zimbabwe and the ban of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic group. The embassy also sponsored a visit by a professor of religion and society from the United States to speak about Islam and its impact on Africa. The Ambassador hosted an iftar to highlight the U.S. government's support for religious diversity.