

SEYCHELLES 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds as well as laws establishing any religion. It provides for freedom of religion, including the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religion. The government bars religious groups from owning radio or television stations; however, it continued to grant larger religious groups programming time on state radio, subject in most cases to advance review and approval. Smaller religious groups did not have access to dedicated broadcast time. Christian religious leaders continued to criticize the government's decision to decriminalize sodomy on the grounds that it violated Christian beliefs. Although the constitution prohibits compulsory religious education, non-Catholic students in public schools providing Catholic instruction did not have access to alternative activities during those classes. The government regularly consulted with an interfaith grouping, the Seychelles Interfaith Council (SIFCO), on national issues, with members appointed to various boards.

SIFCO commented publicly on national issues, which included an appeal in June to youth to keep away from drugs and applauded the establishment of a ministry responsible for family affairs. SIFCO called on the new minister to help the country return to old family values.

The U.S. embassy in Mauritius monitored religious freedom through regular monitoring of religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 94,000 (July 2017 estimate). According to the 2010 census, approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include Anglicans (6 percent), Hindus (2.4 percent), and Muslims (1.6 percent). Smaller religious groups include Bahais and Christian groups such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds and forbids any laws establishing any religion or imposing any religious observance. The constitution permits limitations on freedom of religion only “as prescribed by a law and necessary in a democratic society” in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health, as well as to protect the rights and freedoms of other persons. It provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the right of individuals to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate their religion in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, alone or in community with others, in public or private. These rights may be subject to limitations to protect public order, safety, morality, or health; the rights of others; or other reasons listed in the constitution. The constitution stipulates individuals shall not be required to take a religious oath counter to their religious beliefs or profess any religion as a prerequisite for public office.

The law requires registration for all religious groups as either corporations or associations. To apply through the Registrar of Associations, a group must submit its name, location, rules, and list of assets; the name, occupation, and addresses of officers and at least seven members; and the resolution appointing its officers. A minimum of seven members is required to register an association. To receive tax benefits, notably tax exemptions on the importation of goods, religious groups must also register with the finance ministry. The government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Islam, and the Bahai local spiritual assembly through individual acts of incorporation.

Although no penalties are prescribed for unregistered groups, only those registered as corporate bodies or associations have legal status and the right, for example, to petition the government for broadcast time for religious programming or provide spiritual counsel in prisons.

The constitution prohibits compulsory religious education or participation in religious ceremonies in state schools but permits religious groups to provide religious instruction. Religious instruction is provided by the Catholic and Anglican Churches and offered during school hours. There are no faith-based schools.

The law prohibits religious groups from obtaining radio or television licenses. The government provides broadcast time to religious groups on the national radio broadcasting service. Access is granted based on the size of each group’s membership. Religious groups may publish newspapers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Religious leaders from the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, and other smaller evangelical Christian churches continued to criticize the 2016 decriminalization of sodomy, including taking strong exception to the government-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) for transmitting a live debate about the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexual individuals.

The Office of the Vice President held the portfolio for religious affairs. The government continued to prohibit live broadcasts of all religious programming, with the exception of radio broadcasts, lasting up to 90 minutes each, of Catholic masses and Anglican worship services on alternate Sundays on the SBC. The SBC continued to review and approve all other religious programming to ensure hate speech was not broadcast, but there were no incidents reported. Other religious programming consisted of 15-minute, prerecorded prayer broadcasts, permitted to Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, and Anglican groups every two weeks. Smaller religious groups continued to protest the government policy that did not grant them their own dedicated radio broadcast time. A private radio station did not feature religious programs.

Most state schools continued to operate on land leased by the Catholic Church. Catholic instruction was part of the curriculum, although not compulsory. Non-Catholic students reportedly were often relegated to the back of the classroom during religious instruction and were not offered alternative activities.

The government continued to offer financial assistance to religious groups from the state budget in the form of grants for repairs of places of worship. All religious groups could apply for grants.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

SIFCO, composed of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, and other religious groups present in the country, continued its presence at national official events. For example, SIFCO provided interfaith prayers or blessings at the National Day event celebrating the country's independence. SIFCO commented publicly on national issues and actions taken by the National Assembly and the president, including the decriminalization of sodomy, drugs, HIV/AIDS, the establishment of a truth and

reconciliation commission, as well as other reconciliation efforts. SIFCO applauded the establishment of a ministry responsible for family affairs, and called on the new minister to help the country return to old family values. President Danny Faure met with members of SIFCO regularly, and the Office of the Vice President consulted SIFCO on issues of national interest.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. embassy in Mauritius promoted religious freedom through regular monitoring of the religious community.