



Sao Tome and Principe

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 386 square miles, and its population is approximately 181,000. The population is predominantly Roman Catholic. No official statistics are available; however, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of the population is Catholic, 15 percent is Protestant, 3 percent is Muslim, and 2 percent is atheist. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to the success of Protestant missionaries in the country. Traditional indigenous religions do not exist. Although witchcraft is practiced, it is not considered to be a religion. Practitioners of witchcraft most often are members of a major religion.

There are Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the country. Missionaries of other religions also operate in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that any groups were denied registration or that the activities of unregistered groups were restricted.

There are no restrictions on the activities of foreign clergy, and missionaries in the country operate unhindered.

The Government celebrates some religious holidays as national holidays. These include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy, based in Libreville, Gabon, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. In addition, Embassy officials regularly meet with the country's Catholic bishop, Protestant church leaders, and nongovernmental organizations. Following the 2003 coup attempt, the U.S. Government also encouraged a formal process of national reconciliation that included leaders of various religious organizations.

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