



Seychelles

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 444 square miles and a population of 83,000. The 2002 government census estimated that 82 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent Anglican. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hindus, Muslims, and Baha'is are present in small numbers.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

All religious institutions must apply to the Ministry of Finance to be entitled to tax-free privileges. If an organization does not want tax-free privileges, it is not required to register. The Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Islamic mosques, and the Baha'i local spiritual assembly all have individual acts of incorporation. Other religious groups that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar of Associations. Twenty-five religious organizations were registered with the Registrar of Associations, which provides them with any necessary legal and management framework.

The Government remained uninvolved with religious matters, but it provided program time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. On alternating Sunday mornings, the national radio service aired Catholic Mass and Anglican services, which last from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Muslim and Hindu groups are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday afternoon, and the Baha'is and Seventh-day Adventists are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Saturday afternoon.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Government employees of all religious backgrounds can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such leave is usually granted. The Islamic Society of Seychelles generally submits requests to the Department of Public Administration for Muslim employees to receive leave on Islamic festival days.

The majority of government ministers are Catholic.

The Government assisted a number of religious groups during the reporting period by providing grants to assist in renovation of churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

An amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prevents political parties and religious groups from obtaining radio licenses.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In July 2007 a Muslim prison detainee claimed he was abused by prison guards while in detention at the maximum security prison because his beard was shaved and his prayer mat was taken away from him. The detainee allegedly developed a knee problem that necessitated surgery as a result of his prayer mat being confiscated. Prison authorities denied the existence of any such case and said that the prisoner invented the whole story. The detainee, who has been moved to a new prison facility due to the closure of the maximum security prison, has reported no further discrimination since an imam visited prison authorities in April 2008.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

The U.S. Embassy in Mauritius repeatedly raised concerns about broadcasting restrictions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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