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## Angola

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report**

Report

**September 13, 2011**

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The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The constitution defines the country as a secular state and allows freedom of conscience, religion, and worship.

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 481,351 square miles and an estimated population of 17.3 million. The majority of the population is Christian. The Catholic Church estimated that 55 percent of the population is Catholic, while the government estimated 70 percent; neither figure could be independently verified. Data from the National Institute for Religious Affairs indicate that 25 percent of the population adheres to African Christian denominations; 10 percent follows Protestant traditions, including Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Congregationalist (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God; and 5 percent belongs to Brazilian evangelical churches. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or indigenous religious beliefs. There is a small Muslim community, unofficially estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 adherents, perhaps half of whom are migrants from West Africa or of Lebanese origin. Some sources in the Muslim community put these figures higher, although the accuracy of these estimates is questionable.

The country is traditionally strongly Christian, and the Catholic Church and three protestant denominations have strong historical ties to political movements and regional ethnic groups. Churches remain a forum for political and social organization.

#### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

## Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The constitution, which took effect in February, addresses religion in two articles. Article 10 defines the country as a secular state, separating church and state. Under this article the state recognizes and respects different religious groups, which are free to organize and carry out their activities, provided that they abide by the constitution and the laws. Article 41 provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. It also provides the right to be a conscientious objector.

The government required religious groups to petition for legal status with the justice and culture ministries. Legal status gives religious groups the right to act as juridical persons in the court system, secures their standing as officially registered religious groups, and allows them to construct schools and churches. The Law on Religion (law number 2/04 passed in 2004) requires any group to have more than 100,000 members and be present in 12 of the 18 provinces to gain legal status. This high membership threshold posed a barrier to registration. Leaders must present their doctrine or philosophy, an organizational structure, and a physical location. The government recognizes 83 churches. More than 900 organizations have applied for legal recognition but did not comply with all these provisions of the law. No new organizations have been recognized since 2004. Nonetheless, the government permits these organizations to exist, function, and grow without legal recognition.

The government does not formally recognize any Islamic organization.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday and Christmas.

## Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

The Muslim community claimed they could not practice Islam freely because the government does not recognize Islam and therefore intervenes to close mosques, schools, or community centers.

According to several religious leaders and government officials, the Ministry of Commerce was concerned that Muslim-owned businesses were fronts for mosques.

On July 15, authorities in Viana closed a mosque allegedly for not paying certain fees. The mosque was later reopened.

On September 11, local authorities in Cafunfo, in Cuango, Lunda Norte, demolished a mosque to build a warehouse on the site. During the demolition officials took food, a generator, and construction materials valued at more than AKZ 5.4 million (\$60,000).

## Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country, including religious prisoners and detainees.

Authorities arrested 50 members of the mosque in Huambo Province after arsonists burned the mosque, but it was unclear why they were arrested. Local administrators in Huambo informed leaders of the mosque that they could no longer gather because Islam is not officially recognized.

On September 4, the local administration in Luanda's Cazenga municipality arrested four Muslim youths and detained them for four days. Local authorities also closed a mosque without prior notice or justification. The mosque was reopened one month later.

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### Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

There were reports of discrimination against Muslims.

On February 28, Angolan Public Television (TPA) reported that a Muslim immigrant from Senegal cut off a youth's hand. During the report a psychologist linked this act to Islam. Community leaders later learned that the perpetrator and victim were Christian. TPA did not correct the report for the record.

A Muslim group attempting to build a mosque in Uige Province halted the project because the Christian community felt threatened, according to Mucanza Cangudi, the provincial director of culture, in an interview published on July 1 in the newspaper *Jornal de Angola*. The congregation continued to hold services elsewhere.

On July 7, arsonists burned a mosque in Huambo Province, damaging much of the property inside. The mosque reopened a week later. According to the independent weekly newspaper *O Pais*, the police determined the fire was deliberately set.

Some churches were criticized for alleged profit seeking by exploiting the faithful and demanding excessive monetary contributions from the poor. Many small "family churches" have opened in recent years, often with no more than a dozen members. Some observers accused the founders of these small churches of profit seeking. Critics said the leaders of some family churches frequently exploit the poorest segment of the population and demand tens or hundreds of dollars in tithing in exchange for promises of long life and prosperity. Some large, international religious organizations, such as the Brazilian Universal Church of God and Manã Church, also received criticism for allegedly excessive commercial activity. In addition, critics maintained some religious organizations also create their own NGOs, with profits going to the pastors instead of helping the poor.

Immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo sometimes are criticized for importing nontraditional, syncretic faiths and frequently accused of abuse and witchcraft.

Governmental agencies, church groups, and civil society organizations continued campaigns against indigenous religious practices that involved shamans, animal sacrifices, or "witchcraft." The stated goal of these campaigns was to discourage abusive practices, in particular exorcism rituals, which included willful neglect or physical abuse. According to an April 2009 article in *Novo Jornal*, over the preceding three years, practitioners killed more than 400 persons in "faith-based cures" that involve violent rituals, beatings, and poison.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

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