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## Botswana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

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 reporting period.

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 224,710 square miles and a population of 1.9 million. An estimated 70 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. The Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbers slightly more than 5,000. There are small numbers of Hindus and Baha'is. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espouse no religion.

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

The constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health. However, any suspension of religious freedom by the government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society" under the constitution.

Although it was common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups occasionally led non-Christian prayers during such meetings.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the Registrar of Societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must register before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Any person who holds an official position in, manages, or assists in the management of an unregistered organization is liable to a fine of up to \$145 (1,000 pula) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to \$73 (500 pula) and up to three years in prison.

The registration process normally takes approximately 14 days, although it may take longer if an application requires corrections. Applicants must make corrections to their applications within 90 days of notification of an error on their application. The government automatically terminates applications after a failure to make corrections or to submit the forms, fees, and documents the law mandates. Upon termination or rejection, applicants have 28 days to appeal the decision.

Religious education was part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasized Christianity but also addressed other religious groups in the country. The constitution provides that every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community's expense. The constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, or taking oaths that run counter to an individual's religious beliefs.

#### 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 reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Family of God Church in Mochudi took court action against a local chief after the chief ordered the church to suspend its services. The High Court ruled that the chief's action was against the free practice of religion and overturned his decision.

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

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

#### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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.

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