



## Botswana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

**October 26, 2009**

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 1.8 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 law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although it is common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups occasionally lead non-Christian prayers during such meetings. The Constitution also provides for the protection of the rights and freedoms of other persons, including the right to observe and practice any religion without unsolicited intervention.

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 be registered 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 \$140 (Pula 1,000) and/or up to seven

years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to \$70 (Pula 500) and/or up to three years in prison.

The registration process normally takes approximately 14 days; it may take longer if an application requires corrections. Applicants must make corrections to their applications within 90 days of being notified of an error on their application. Applications are automatically terminated after failure to make corrections or to submit the required forms, fees, and documents the law mandates. If an application is terminated or rejected, applicants have 28 days to appeal the decision.

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

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but also addresses 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.

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.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

#### 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. Representatives of the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i communities came together in April 2009 to form and register an official interfaith council. The group planned to meet quarterly to discuss religious issues and promote interfaith dialogue.

#### 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.