



## Botswana

### 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 contribute 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 224,710 square miles and a population of 1.7 million. An estimated 70 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and 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 country's 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.

Religious services are well attended in both rural and urban areas.

#### 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. 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 other religious groups are not excluded from leading non-Christian prayers at such occasions. 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 the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion.

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. The registration process takes approximately 14 days due to the introduction of new guidelines for developing an organization's constitution. 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 \$166 (Pula 1,000) and/or up to 7 years in prison. Any member of an

unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to \$83 (Pula 500) and/or up to 3 years in prison.

Eighty-four religious groups registered from July 2007 to May 2008; during this period 46 religious groups began the process of registration but had their applications terminated. The applications were automatically terminated after failure to submit required forms, fees, or constitution within 90 days, as the law mandates. No religious organization was deregistered during the reporting period.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day as national holidays. Members of other religious groups are allowed to commemorate their religious holidays without government interference.

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but 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 period covered by this report.

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" by 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 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. Several religious groups were in the process of registering an official interfaith council, which was expected to include representatives of the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i communities.

#### 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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