

# **BOTSWANA 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There was one report of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders condemned the action, recognized the exceptional nature of the incident, and took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The ambassador met multiple times with a well known religious leader to discuss promoting human rights, including religious freedom. Embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The 2012 census estimates the population at 2,030,000. The U.S. government estimates that approximately 70 percent of citizens are members of Christian groups, 6 percent are adherents of the traditional indigenous religion Badimo, and 1 percent belong to other religious groups. Approximately 20 percent espouse no religion.

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. According to a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center, there are approximately 8,000 Muslims, many of whom are of South Asian origin. There are small numbers of Hindus and Bahais. Immigrants, including foreign workers, are more likely to be members of non-Christian religious groups than are native-born citizens.

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

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

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The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution permits the government to suspend religious freedom in the interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health when the suspension is deemed “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society,” but it has never done so.

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. A group must register in order to conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account at a local bank. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (\$126) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered group is subject to penalties including fines up to 500 pula (\$63) and up to three years in prison.

Optional religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but also addresses other religious groups in the country. There are private Christian and Muslim schools, and the constitution provides that every religious group may establish places for religious instruction at the group’s expense. The government regulates all private schools and does not distinguish between religious and non-religious schools. The constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, and taking oaths that run counter to an individual’s religious beliefs.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. Non-Christian businesses often close on their respective holidays and non-Christians often observe their holidays using annual leave.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

In December, the vice president officiated at the opening of a Sikh temple in Gaborone, and used the opportunity to recognize the importance of religious tolerance.

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

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

There was one report of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In November, vandals spray-painted the walls of Gaborone's main mosque with graffiti praising Jesus Christ and urging Muslims to convert. Christian leaders condemned the graffiti as inflammatory. Muslim leaders recognized the defacement as an isolated incident.

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

Embassy representatives raised religious freedom with government officials. The ambassador met multiple times with a well known religious figure, who is also outspoken on human rights issues, to discuss religious freedom.