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## Lesotho

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 11,720 square miles and a population of 1.9 million. Eighty percent of the population is Christian and members of indigenous religious groups make up approximately 20 percent of the population. There are an estimated 4,000 Muslim families, 150 Hindu families, and 800 members of the Baha'i faith. Muslim and Hindu numbers have declined significantly in recent years due to emigration to South Africa. There are a small number of Jews but no practicing Jewish community.

While Christians can be found throughout the country, Muslims live primarily in Butha-Buthe, Leribe, and Berea districts, which are situated in the north. Many Christians practice traditional cultural beliefs and rituals in conjunction with Christianity.

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

The government has no established requirements for religious group recognition. Any registered religious group may apply for a waiver of taxes and duties on charitable donations from outside the country; however, in practice few, if any, waivers are given because the registered religious groups do not always apply for such waivers. Unregistered groups are not eligible for any government benefits, such as duty free import permits for donated items or tax deductions on donated funds. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the government, regardless of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements for registration are a constitution and a leadership committee. There are no penalties for not registering, and it is common for informal church groups not to register.

The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools. The Catholic Church operates an estimated 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church also operate schools.

The Christian Council of Lesotho played an important role in the mediation of conflict between the government and opposition political parties who were contesting the allocation of proportional representational seats in the national assembly following the 2007 general elections.

#### 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.

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. Mutual respect between Christians and Muslims was the norm; various ecumenical efforts promoted cooperation on social matters.

#### 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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