



Lesotho

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 11,720 square miles and a population of 1.9 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. The Christian Council of Lesotho, a nongovernmental organization made up of representatives of all major Christian churches in the country, estimates that 90 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics represent 45 percent of the population, Lesotho Evangelicals 27 percent, Anglicans 9 percent, and other Christian groups such as the Seventh-day Adventist, American Methodist Episcopal, Dutch Reformed, Lesotho Methodist, and Pentecostal churches together constitute 9 percent. Members of indigenous religious groups make up approximately 10 percent of the population. There are an estimated 1,000 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 law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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 on charitable donations from outside the country; however, in practice few, if any, waivers are given. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the Government, regardless of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements are a constitution and a leadership committee. Unregistered groups are not eligible for any government benefits, such as duty-free import permits for donated items or tax deductions on donated funds. 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 have schools.

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 Government allocated prime real estate for the Muslim community to build a mosque and other facilities, ending years of bureaucratic delays.

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. 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.