



Malawi

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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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; however, there was some tension between Christians and Muslims during the period covered by this report.

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 45,747 square miles and a population of 13 million. Eighty percent of the population is Christian. Among the Christian groups, the largest are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. There is a substantial Muslim minority totaling approximately 13 percent of the population. The vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. There are also Hindus, Baha'is, and small numbers of Rastafarians and Jews.

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.

Religious groups must register with the Government by submitting documentation to the Ministry of Justice detailing the structure and mission of the organization along with a nominal fee. Once approved, a religious group registers formally with the Registrar General's Office. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

The Government observes Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits. Missionaries and charitable workers pay lower fees for employment permits than do other professionals.

The President, Bingu wa Mutharika, is Catholic, and the Vice President is Muslim. Several cabinet members and parliamentarians are Muslim. President Mutharika regularly sends official regards to members of all faiths in the country on appropriate religious holidays.

Religious leaders were free to speak publicly on political and social matters.

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.

[Rastafarian leaders](#) continued to take issue with an unofficial ban on long hair in public schools. Although there is no law relating to hair length, some schools prohibit long hair as part of their dress code. Government officials maintain that this policy is not intended to infringe upon any religious rights.

In 2007 public schools began offering religious education at the primary school level. These courses had previously been available only in secondary schools. Both a Christian-oriented "Bible Knowledge" course and a "Moral and Religious Education" course, including Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and Christian material are available. Individual parent-teacher associations or school committees decide which religion courses to offer, and some primary schools offer only "Bible Knowledge." While the courses are voluntary, some Muslims feel that primary age children are too young to decide which class to attend and have requested that the Ministry of Education only use the broader-based "Moral and Religious Education" course in primary schools. The Ministry of Education requires that all schools observe the right of the student or his/her parents to choose the religious instruction subject of his/her choice.

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; however, there were occasional tensions between Christians and Muslims that appeared to be fueled largely by politics, particularly the debate over the legality of the candidacy of the former president, Bakili Muluzi, a Muslim, in the 2009 presidential elections. Christians, Muslims, and a small Hindu minority generally coexisted peacefully, often participating in business or civil society organizations together.

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. U.S. embassy officials maintain frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials. Embassy officials appeared on local radio (including Radio Islam) to discuss issues of religious freedom and tolerance.

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