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Mozambique

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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 308,642 square miles and a population of 21.7 million. According to the 1997 census, 24 percent is Roman Catholic, 22 percent is Protestant, 20 percent is Muslim, and one-third of the population does not profess a religion or belief; however, religious leaders speculated that a significant proportion of this group practiced some form of indigenous religion, a category not included in the 1997 census. The South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim.

Christian groups include Anglican, Baptist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as various other evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. The three principal Islamic organizations are the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. There are small Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups.

Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coast, while areas of the northern interior have a stronger concentration of Christian communities. Christians are more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslims also live in these areas.

Muslim journalists reported that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a was not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims were much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow than as Sunni or Shi'a. There were significant differences between the practices of Muslims of African origin and those of South Asian background. In addition African Muslim clerics have increasingly sought training in Egypt, Kuwait, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia, returning with a more fundamental approach than the local traditional, Sufi-inspired Swahili Islam particularly common in the north.

Many small churches that have split from mainstream denominations fused African indigenous beliefs and practices within a Christian framework. Some Muslims also continued to perform indigenous rituals.

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 does not officially favor a particular religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists claimed tacit discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some Muslims believe that Eid al-Fitr should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed under the guise of family unification.

The government officially acknowledged the Eid festival by permitting Muslims to take leave on this day, with a presidential speech, and with other events. The government recognized Eid on a date identified by the South Asian community, a perceived slight to black Muslims, who celebrated the festival on a different day. However, in the festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Ada in September and November 2009, the matter of the sighting of the moon was less controversial since Muslims of both groups tended to celebrate the festival practically on the same day. The chairman of the Islamic Council of Mozambique, Aminnudin Mohammad, acknowledged that this was less of a problem than in past years.

The constitution prohibits political parties from directly affiliating with a religion or church.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal sources of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No particular benefits or privileges were associated with registration, and there were no reports that the government refused to register any religious group during the reporting period. The Christian Council reported that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worshiped unhindered by the government. There were 749 religious denominations and 167 religious organizations registered with the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the reporting period, four denominations and 11 religious organizations registered.

The government routinely granted visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries faced a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conducted their activities without government interference.

The constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and a more recent law permits them to own and operate schools, which were increasing in number. Religious instruction was the primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools. Universities associated with religious denominations did not offer religious studies; many students at Catholic University branches were Muslim, particularly in Pemba and Nampula. The government strictly prohibited all religious instruction in public 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.

While all major religious groups are represented in the National Assembly and government ministries, many Muslims felt underrepresented because Christians held the majority of leadership positions in the government as well as in media services. President Guebuza named Aires Ali, a Muslim from the north, as prime minister in February 2010. In May 2010 a prominent Muslim cleric from the northern province of Nampula, Sheik Abdul Razac Ali Salimo, was among seven new members elected to the 17-member state council by the National Assembly.

The Catholic Church and some Muslim organizations continued discussions with the government regarding land seized from religious groups after independence. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial governments, the Directorate of Religious Affairs has a mandate to address the general issue. The papal nunciature reported that the government continued to occupy church properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia provinces, which had been used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the Vatican had entered into negotiations with the government for their restitution.

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.

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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