

MOZAMBIQUE 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 were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and civil society throughout the year. These efforts included meeting with religious leaders and groups, promoting interfaith understanding by holding joint meetings with representatives of different religious groups, and hosting events, including an iftar.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 23.9 million, according to a 2011 World Bank report. The 2007 census estimates that 28 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 27 percent is Protestant, 18 percent is Muslim, 9 percent is divided among many small groups, and approximately 18 percent does not profess a religion or belief. Religious leaders speculate that a significant portion of the population adheres to syncretic indigenous religious beliefs, a category not included in the 2007 census. Muslim leaders state that their community accounts for closer to 25-30 percent of the population, a statistic frequently reported in the press. There are small numbers of Jews, Hindus, and Bahais.

The South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim, and there are some differences between their practices and the traditional, Sufi-inspired Swahili Islam of Muslims of African origin. An increasing number of African Muslim clerics travel to Egypt, Kuwait, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia for training, and some return with a more conservative approach to Islam.

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.

By law, religious institutions and missionary organizations must register with the Ministry of Justice. This is a straightforward process and there are no particular benefits or privileges associated with registration.

The government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries, although the process for all foreign residents is somewhat burdensome.

The constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and a more recent law permits them to own and operate schools. The government strictly prohibits all religious instruction in government-run schools.

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

The government observes the nonreligious holiday "Family Day" on December 25, which coincides with Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

During the year, 49 religious groups and eight religious organizations registered with the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice, for a total of 798 religious groups and 190 religious organizations registered.

The government did not officially favor any particular religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists claimed the government discriminated against the Muslim community. They cited the example of the national "Family Day" holiday observed on December 25. Some Muslims asserted that Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Udha (Eid al-Adha) should also be national holidays, given that Christmas was observed under the rubric of family unification. Although not required by law, the Labor Ministry commonly granted a day of administrative leave for Muslims to celebrate those holidays. The Labor Ministry also commonly granted administrative leave for other religious holidays, including Christmas Eve and Good Friday, as well as for nonreligious holidays such as New Year's Eve.

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Members of all major religious groups were represented in the National Assembly and held senior cabinet and media jobs. Muslims stated that they held proportionally fewer of those positions than did non-Muslims.

The Catholic Church continued discussions with the government regarding land seized from religious groups after independence. While provincial governments were responsible for establishing a process for property restitution, the Directorate of Religious Affairs had a mandate to address the general issue.

The Roman Catholic archbishop stated that the government returned previously nationalized churches in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia provinces. The government retained control of hospitals and schools previously run by the church in these provinces, but the church did not seek the return of those properties because it did not have the resources to run them. The archbishop stated that the church was satisfied with this outcome.

In August the education minister announced that Muslim girls could wear the headscarf in public schools for the duration of Ramadan. Following this announcement, Muslims in Nampula successfully lobbied the government to lift the year-round ban on wearing the headscarf. Members of the Muslim community sought permission to wear the headscarf in photos for identity documents; however, the legality of wearing the headscarf in photos for identity documents remained uncertain, as did the wearing of the veil or burqa in public schools.

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 ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and civil society throughout the year. U.S. embassy officials promoted interfaith understanding by holding joint meetings with representatives of different religious groups. The ambassador hosted an iftar.