

NAMIBIA 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.

U.S. embassy officials engaged with the government, with religious groups, and with civil society to support religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The 2011 census estimates the population at 2.1 million. Although there are no official statistics on religious affiliation, more than 90 percent of the population reportedly identifies as Christian. The three largest Christian groups are the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches. Other denominations are the Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and evangelical and charismatic churches, as well as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia. The number of Pentecostal churches is growing, often with Nigerian, Zimbabwean, and other African pastors preaching in urban areas and in the north. A number of Zionist churches combine Christianity and traditional African beliefs. There are also small numbers of Muslims, Bahais, Jews, and Buddhists, primarily in urban areas.

Members of the Dutch Reformed Church are predominantly ethnic Afrikaners. Members of the Himba and San ethnic groups often combine indigenous religious beliefs with Christianity. The few Muslims are mostly Sunni and are predominantly immigrants from elsewhere in Africa or recent converts.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

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There is no state religion. The law allows recognition of any religious group through formal registration.

To receive tax exempt status, a religious group must register as a welfare organization with the Ministry of Health and Social Services. A religious group operating an income-generating program must also register as a not-for-profit organization with the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

If a religious group seeks to obtain land at the reduced rate offered to welfare organizations, it must demonstrate to the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing, and Rural Development that it has registered with the Ministry of Health and Social Services as a welfare organization, has a constitution, is a member of the Council of Churches, and has sound financial management. The group must have at least 250 members and have been in operation for at least two years. The law also permits a religious group that is not a member of the Council of Churches to register as a nongovernmental organization.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government respected religious freedom and periodically included religious leaders in important discussions regarding the country's future. The president held annual consultations with religious leaders.

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.

Although differences in leadership frequently led to the formation of new churches, religious leaders generally cooperated and spoke respectfully of one another.

The University of Namibia in Windhoek provided a room for Muslim students to use as a mosque and for meetings.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy engaged with the government, religious groups, and civil society in activities to support religious freedom. U.S. embassy representatives met religious leaders and communities to better understand changes to the country's social landscape and any potential issues of discrimination.