



## Swaziland

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 a few 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 6,700 square miles and a population of 1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. An influential Roman Catholic presence includes many churches, schools, and other infrastructure. The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey found that the population 15-49 years old is 37 percent Zionist, 21 percent mainline Protestant, 14 percent Charismatic, 7 percent Apostolic, 5 percent Catholic, and 3 percent Pentecostal; 11 percent described itself as having no religion. The remaining 2 percent is divided among the Baha'i Faith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, Islam, African traditional churches, and others. Mainline Protestant denominations include Anglican, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopalian, and Methodist. Muslims and Baha'is generally live in urban areas. Most immigrants from South Asia practice Islam.

Zionist and Pentecostal churches are growing quickly, perhaps because of the influence of the royal family, many of whom are preachers and church leaders.

#### **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 at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Article 23 of the Constitution states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." The Constitution protects the right to practice by guaranteeing "[the] freedom [to] worship either alone or in community with others."

Apart from the Constitution, there is no law, statute, or regulation that protects the right of religious freedom or

provides effective remedies for the violation of that right.

Teaching of Religious Knowledge is mandatory in primary school and is an elective subject in secondary and high schools; it is limited to Christian theology. The only organized religious youth clubs permitted to operate in schools are Christian. However, the Government did not enforce this rule, and non-Christian groups registered no complaints regarding this practice during the reporting period.

Portions of the capital are zoned specifically for places of worship. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government does not restrict religious groups with financial means from building places of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy.

Christian programming is available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets, Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service (SBIS) and Swazi Television; however, government-owned television and radio stations do not grant non-Christian religious groups airtime for broadcasting, a source of complaints from minority religious groups. These groups claimed that SBIS did not respond to their request letters, that the Ministry of Home Affairs or SBIS told them they must receive permission from the Conference of Churches, and that their requests for meetings with the Conference of Churches and relevant government officials were ignored.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. Although Easter Sunday is not officially considered a national holiday, persons who work on that day draw holiday pay.

The monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many Christian activities. It has become common practice for the King, the Queen Mother, and other members of the royal family to attend evangelical programs, including Good Friday and Easter weekend services. At such services, the King is usually afforded the opportunity to preach.

There is no legislation describing the organizational requirements of a religious group; however, under the Protection of Names and Badges Act 10/69, new religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered "organized," the group should submit its application through one of the country's three umbrella religious bodies: the League of Churches, Conference of Swaziland Churches, or Council of Swaziland Churches. The Government prefers for newly formed churches to be referred and recommended by one of these bodies before the Ministry of Home Affairs considers its registration. However, the Government allows religious groups that do not belong to any of the three bodies to register. After an organization is recommended, the Registrar General's Office in the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs will register the organization. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider proof of a religious leader, congregation, and a place of worship as grounds to grant organized status. Organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

The Government allows religious instruction, primarily Christian, in public schools. Voluntary school clubs conducted daily prayer services in many 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.

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 a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Church-related land disputes and rivalries between branches of some sects resulted in violence, sometimes deadly, and arson.

All three of the above-mentioned Christian umbrella organizations were open to all Christian groups. These groups primarily collaborated on common rural development and missionary strategies, although they sometimes strongly disagreed with one another.

### **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.