



Swaziland

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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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 period covered by this report. Minority groups' lack of access to government-operated radio and television stations remained a problem.

There were no reports of societal abuse 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 954,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continues to flourish. The population is approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent is divided among the Baha'i Faith, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and others. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally are located in urban areas. Most immigrants from South Asia practice Islam.

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 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.

Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas are national holidays.

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. The royal family also occasionally attends Ascension Day worship services at the

national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement.

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 must submit its application through one of the country's three religious bodies: the League of Churches, Conference of Swaziland Churches, or the Council of Swaziland Churches. A newly formed church has to be referred and recommended by one of these groups before the Ministry of Home Affairs can consider its registration. After being recommended, the Registrar General's Office in the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs will register the organization. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider demonstration of a proper building, a pastor or other religious leader, and a congregation as sufficient 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.

The Government neither restricts nor formally promotes interfaith dialogue, and it does not provide formal mechanisms for religions to reconcile differences.

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.

Teaching of Religious Knowledge as an elective subject in secondary and high schools is limited to Christian theology. The only organized religious youth clubs permitted to operate in schools are Christian, but the Government did not enforce this rule. During the reporting period, no complaints were registered by non-Christian groups regarding this practice.

Portions of the capital are zoned specifically for places of worship of all denominations. 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 has not restricted any religion with financial means from building a place of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy.

Government-owned television and radio stations did not give non-Christian religious groups air time for broadcasting. Christian programming was available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets, Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service (SBIS) and Swazi Television. South African satellite television service, DSTV, carried several religious channels, but local minority groups have not approached the company to broadcast Swazi programs. Church groups owned several newsletters and magazines. Religious minorities have access to print media.

Minority religious groups complained that although the Constitution enshrines freedom of religion, they are denied broadcast time. They claimed either SBIS does not respond to their request letters, the Ministry of Home Affairs or SBIS tells them they must receive permission from the Conference of Churches, or requests for meetings with the Conference of Churches and relevant government officials are ignored.

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.

Christian churches were well organized and were divided into three groups: the Council of Churches, the League of Churches, and the Conference of Churches. Each group was open to members of all denominations. However, Zionists and all African traditional churches belonged to the League of Churches; most evangelical churches associated with the Conference of Churches; and Anglican, Catholic, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches generally belonged to the Council of Churches. These groups primarily collaborated on common rural development and missionary strategies. Although the groups sometimes strongly disagreed with one another, they have also found common ground on topics of concern.

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. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact and good relations with the various religious organizations.

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