



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [2010 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) » [Near East and North Africa](#) » [Western Sahara](#)

Western Sahara

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Moroccan government in the territory during the reporting period.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government of Morocco as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Western Sahara has an area of 165,000 square miles and an estimated population of 450,000. A majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, while a very small Catholic minority functions openly without significant problems. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, the veneration of religious figures and the tombs in which they are believed to be interred.

There is a small foreign community working for the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Many of its members are non-Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In June 2010 government authorities informed a Spanish foreign resident of expulsion orders to deport her for violating a statute in the penal code which prohibits efforts to proselytize Sunni Maliki Muslims. However, the authorities subsequently granted the individual's request to complete her three-year contract and depart on her own accord. She departed the country and reportedly had elected not to appeal the expulsion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the territory.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion in the territory.

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, through the U.S. embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

[Back to Top](#)

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