



Western Sahara

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution 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 Government during the reporting period.

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

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 a population of 394,000. A majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, while a very small Catholic minority appears to function openly without significant problems. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, the veneration of religious figures and their assumed tombs.

There is a small foreign community working for the U.N. peacekeeping contingent, the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Most of its members are not Muslims.

Section II. Status of 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

Restrictions on religious freedom in the territory are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

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.

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.

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