



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#) » [Africa](#) » [Zambia](#)

Zambia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 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 290,586 square miles and a population of 13.5 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, one percent is Muslim or Hindu, and seven percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent are Muslim; numerous others are Hindu. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

A 1996 amendment to the constitution declares Christianity to be the official religion of the country (while upholding the right of all persons to enjoy freedom of conscience or religion). On August 31, the National Constitutional Conference adopted a clause reaffirming the amendment in the draft constitution being considered by parliament. The existing constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion for all citizens; freedom to change religion or belief; and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other statutes provide effective remedies to address religious freedom violations. These provisions were enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs. To be eligible for registration, a group must have a unique name; possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws; and display general compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups may be fined and members imprisoned for up to seven years.

The government requires Christian instruction in public schools. The classes are conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and are mandatory for all students through grade seven. Islamic or other forms of religious education are not available in public schools but are in some private schools.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There was one report of abuse of religious freedom in the country, including religious prisoners and detainees.

On November 6, police reportedly arrested 26 leaders from the B7 Zion Church in Mpulungu and charged them with belonging to an unregistered society, being leaders of an unlawful society, and with unlawful assembly. Church members allegedly refused, for religious reasons, to register as voters or to participate in the census. On December 17, they were convicted and fined ZK 200,000 (\$41) each.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 12, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) moved the date of a parliamentary by-election date from Saturday, October 30, to Monday, October 25, after religious and human rights leaders petitioned the ECZ to change the date. The leaders argued that holding the by-election on a Saturday would disenfranchise those who worshipped on Saturdays.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and to discuss national concerns.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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[Back to Top](#)