



## Zambia

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 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 12.5 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent Muslim or Hindu, and 7 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Five percent did not report a religious affiliation.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone and in Chipata and other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian descent are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage of this group as well. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

#### 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 law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

A 1996 amendment to the Constitution declared Christianity to be the official religion of the country while upholding the right of all persons to enjoy freedom of conscience or religion. Article 19 of the 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 for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are 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, groups 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. During the reporting period, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

The Government requires Christian religious 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; however, they are available 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 practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

On April 13, 2009, the Catholic Church relieved a priest of his duties and his parish, reportedly in response to government pressure after the priest criticized the Government harshly on his popular radio program. However, religious leaders were generally free to criticize the Government, organize political activities, and mobilize public opinion.

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

Leaders of ecumenical movements, such as 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.

#### 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.

Embassy officials met with a wide spectrum of religious representatives to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration.