



Zambia

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

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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.

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 11.9 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 their religion.

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 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 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.

Governmental controls require the registration of religious groups. To be eligible for registration, groups must have a unique name; possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws; and display compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are not allowed to operate. Violators can face a fine and imprisonment for up to 7 years. In March 2006 then-Foreign Minister Ronnie Shikapwasha stated publicly that the Government would begin to consult with the Council of Churches before registering new church groups.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Saturday, and Christmas as national holidays.

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.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups, although there were reports that the Government began to enforce registration requirements more strictly.

During the reporting period, the Catholic Apostolic National Church of Zambia was founded as a protest against the Catholic Church's stand on celibacy. Minister Shikapwasha announced that under the 2006 policy, the Government should have consulted with the Council of Churches over the church's registration.

Religious leaders were free to openly criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion.

The Government required Christian religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and is 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 private schools owned or controlled by those religious groups. Parents may homeschool their children.

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.

Leaders of various 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 interfaith dialogue 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. During the reporting period, embassy officers met with representatives of the Islamic Council of Zambia, leaders of Islamic schools, and leaders of church organizations such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, and the Council of Churches of Zambia. Representatives of a broad spectrum of religious groups were also regularly included in public diplomacy outreach and representational events.

Released on September 19, 2008

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