



Angola

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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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, although it made registration difficult for minority religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated 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 481,351 square miles and a population of 17 million. The majority of the population is Christian and Roman Catholics are the largest religious group. The Catholic Church estimates that 55 percent of the population is Catholic, while the Government estimates 70 percent; neither figure could be independently verified. Data from the National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR) indicate that 25 percent of the population adheres to African Christian denominations; 10 percent follows Protestant traditions, including Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Congregationalist (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God; and 5 percent belongs to Brazilian evangelical churches. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or indigenous religious beliefs. There is a small Muslim community, unofficially estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 adherents, perhaps one-half of whom are migrants from West Africa or of Lebanese origin.

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 Government continued its ban on 17 religious groups in Cabinda on charges of practicing harmful exorcism rituals on adults and children accused of witchcraft, illegally holding religious services in residences, and lack of official registration.

The Government observes Good Friday and Christmas as national holidays.

The Media Law requires nonpublic radio networks to have a physical presence in a province to broadcast there. This requirement limits the reach of religious media such as the Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia, which hosts spirited political debates that are at times critical of government policies.

The Government requires religious groups to petition for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. Legal status gives religious groups the right to act as juridical persons in the court system, secures their standing as officially registered religious groups, and allows them to construct schools and churches. Groups must provide general background information and have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration. This high membership threshold poses a barrier to registration and the accompanying benefits of legal status.

The Ministries of Justice and Culture recognize 85 denominations but did not register any religious groups during the reporting period. More than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical groups, had registration applications pending with INAR, which did not process them, as the groups failed to demonstrate that they had at least 100,000 members. Nonetheless, the Government did not bar the activities of these groups.

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.

In March 2009 the head of INAR, Maria de Fatima Republicano Viegas, said the Government was concerned about Islam in the country and would investigate the activities of all mosques over concerns that Islamic practices go against cultural norms. The domestic intelligence service (SINFO), charged with compiling a report on mosque activities, has begun conducting these investigations. Republicano described Islam as alien to the culture and traditions of the country and claimed it victimized women who married Muslim men.

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 isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Public attitudes toward Islam were generally negative. Cultural differences between native Angolans and Muslim West African immigrants were cited as a basis for negative views toward Islam, as was the perceived link between Islam and illegal immigration.

Governmental agencies, church groups, and civil society organizations continued campaigns against indigenous religious practices that involve shamans, animal sacrifices, or "witchcraft." The stated goal of these campaigns was to discourage abusive practices, in particular exorcism rituals, which included willful neglect or physical abuse. In October 2008 police closed two African Christian churches in Luanda and Cabinda following allegations that the churches' spiritual leaders detained and mistreated approximately 40 children.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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