



## Mozambique

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles and a population of 19.9 million. According to the most recent census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in 1997, half of the population does not profess to practice a religion or creed; however, religious leaders expected the census scheduled for late 2007 to show that virtually all of these persons recognize or practice some form of traditional indigenous religion. According to the 1997 census, 24 percent are Roman Catholic, 22 percent are Protestant, and 20 percent are Muslim. Many Muslim leaders disagree with this statistic, claiming that since Islam is the major religion practiced in the most populous provinces of the country, at least 50 percent of the population must be Muslim.

Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coastal strip, but some areas of the northern interior have a stronger concentration of Protestant or Catholic communities. Protestants and Catholics are generally more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslim minority populations are also present in these areas.

The National Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Justice states evangelical Christians represent the fastest growing religious group in the country. Generally religious communities tend to draw their members from across ethnic, political, economic, and racial lines. The growing South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim and follows the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence.

There are 732 religious denominations and 144 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the reporting period 10 denominations and 20 religious organizations were registered. Major Christian religious groups include Anglican, Baptist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. Many small, independent Protestant and Catholic churches that have split from mainstream denominations fuse African traditional beliefs and practices within a Christian framework.

The Government reports that no Islamic subgroups are registered; however, the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni, with the small Shi'a minority principally of South Asian origin. The three principal Islamic organizations are the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. The Kuwaiti-funded and Sudanese-managed nongovernmental organization (NGO) African Muslim Agency conducted humanitarian work, as did the Muslim development agency Aga Khan. Muslim journalists report that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims are much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow than as Sunni or Shi'a. The country's Muslim population represents the four schools of thought in Islamic law: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups are registered and constitute a very small percentage of the population.

The country's leading mosques and the Catholic Church have gradually eliminated many traditional indigenous practices from their places of worship, instituting practices that reflect a stricter interpretation of sacred texts; however, some Christian and Muslim adherents continue to incorporate traditional practices and rituals, and religious authorities have generally been permissive of such practices.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country. Some groups offer religious teaching centers to their local communities, while others provide scholarships for students to study in their respective countries.

## Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not favor a particular religion, nor is there a state or dominant religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists objected to what they say is silent discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday that is observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some members of the Muslim community believe that Eid al-Fitr should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed de facto under the guise of family unification.

The Government officially acknowledges the Muslim Eid festival on a date recognized by the South Asians, to the dismay of Black Muslims, who celebrate the festival on a different day.

While all major religious groups are well represented in the National Assembly and in various government ministries, many Muslims felt like second class citizens, primarily because the majority of leadership positions in the Government and media services were held by Christians.

As a result of the absence of a prominent Muslim leader on the Council of State, a constitutionally mandated advisory body created in 2005, and the subsequent claims by Muslim leaders of favoritism toward Christians, a significant number of Muslim leaders lobbied the Government during the period covered by this report for the appointment of a Muslim as Ombudsman.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal source of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No particular benefits or privileges are associated with registration, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the period covered by this report. The Christian Council reported that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worship unhindered by the Government.

The Government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conduct their activities without government interference.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and these institutions are allowed by law to own and operate schools, which are increasing in numbers. Several Islamic schools were under construction or rehabilitation. Many Protestant organizations have also opened primary and secondary schools in recent years, primarily in the central and northern provinces. The Catholic University has educational facilities in Beira, Nampula, Cuamba, and Pemba. Religious instruction is a primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools, but the universities associated with religious denominations either do not emphasize or offer religious studies. Many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

Religious activities and positions were reported in the press without restriction; however, some Muslim journalists complained that the press gave more coverage to Christian holidays than Islamic days of cultural and religious importance.

### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Constitution prohibits

political parties from being directly affiliated with a religion or church or of using religious symbols. The Constitution prohibits political parties from being directly affiliated with a religion or church and from using religious symbols.

Most places of worship nationalized by the Government in 1977 have been returned to their respective religious organizations; however, the Catholic Church and a few Muslim communities maintain that other properties, including schools, health centers, and private residences, remain in state hands. The groups continued to press for their return. The issue of restitution is complex, as many of these buildings continue to be used for government-administered schools and clinics. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial government, the Directorate for Religious Affairs is mandated to address the general issue of restitution. Return of the properties often is delayed due to the construction of new facilities, particularly schools and health clinics. The Papal Nunciature reported that the Government continued to occupy properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia Provinces that were used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the Vatican had entered into negotiations with the Government for their restitution. Because of the complexity of the restitution issue and seeming contradictions within the law, the return of property is seen by the Catholic Church as less recourse to the judicial system than a process of collaboration.

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 belief or practice, and prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Many Muslims felt like second class citizens, primarily because the majority of positions in government, information, and media services were held by Christians. For example, the Universal Church owns the Rede Miramar radio and television stations and various real estate holdings throughout the country.

Within the Muslim community, the black and South Asian communities tend to remain separate, with each group generally attending different mosques and schools. While relations between blacks and established Mozambicans of South Asian origin are generally good, cultural conflict between black communities and South Asian immigrants has led to tensions. There was controversy over the official date of the Eid al-Fitr Muslim festival; as Black Muslims choose a date based on when the full moon is sighted from anywhere within the geographical boundaries of Mozambique, whereas Asian Muslims choose a date based on when the full moon is sighted from anywhere within the country and within a much wider area outside the country. The Asian Muslim vantage points result in the full moon being sighted on a day different from the day that the Black Muslims sight it which makes the holding of Eid contentious. Despite these differences, there are signs that tension are lessening as younger Muslims seem to recognize the need for dialogue to reconcile their differences.

#### 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.

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