



Swaziland

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The new Constitution, which went into effect on February 8, 2006, provides for freedom of religion. The Government generally respected freedom of religion 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 abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 approximately 6,700 square miles and a population of 1.1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continues to flourish. The population is approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent of the population is divided among the Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and other religious groups. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally are located in urban areas. There are few atheists.

Missionaries continue to play a role in rural development. Most immigrants from South Asia practice Islam.

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.

Article 23 of the new Constitution states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." The Constitution protects the right to practice by guaranteeing "[the] freedom [to] worship either alone or in community with others."

Apart from the Constitution, there is no law, statute, or regulation that protects the right of religious freedom or provides effective remedies for the violation of that right.

Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, and Ascension Day are national holidays. The monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many Christian activities. It has become common practice for the King, the Queen Mother, and other members of the royal family to attend various evangelical programs, including Good Friday and Easter weekend services. At such services the King is usually afforded the opportunity to preach. The royal family also occasionally attends Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement.

There is no legislation in the country describing the organizational requirements of a religious group; however, new

religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered organized, a religious group must demonstrate possession of either substantial cash reserves or financial support from foreign religious groups with established ties to western or eastern religions. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider demonstration of a proper building, a pastor or religious leader, and a congregation as sufficient to grant organized status. These organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

Portions of the capital city are zoned specifically for places of worship of all denominations. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Those religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government has not restricted any religion with financial means from building a place of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience minor delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy due to a slow bureaucracy.

The Government allows religious instruction, primarily Christian, in public schools. Voluntary school clubs conducted daily prayer services in many public schools.

The Government neither restricts nor formally promotes interfaith dialogue, and it does not provide formal mechanisms for religions to reconcile differences.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of all religious faiths generally were free to worship without government interference or restriction. Teaching of Religious Knowledge as an elective subject in secondary and high schools is limited to Christian theology. The only organized religious youth clubs permitted to operate in schools are Christian, but the Government did not enforce this rule. During the reporting period, no complaints were registered by non-Christian groups regarding this practice.

The government-owned television and radio stations did not permit non-Christian religious groups to broadcast messages. Christian programming was available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets--Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service and Swazi Television. The local satellite television service, DSTV (cable service is not available), carried at least one religious channel. Church groups owned several newsletters and magazines.

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 abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Five different religious groups peacefully maintain adjoining properties in Mbabane. There was no public conflict among religious groups during the period covered by this report.

Christian churches were well organized and were divided into three groups: the Council of Churches, the League of Churches, and the Conference of Churches. Each group was open to members of all denominations. However, Zionists and all African traditional churches belonged to the League of Churches; most evangelical churches associated with the Conference of Churches; and Anglican, Catholic, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches generally belonged to the Council of Churches. These groups primarily produced common statements on political matters, facilitated the sharing of radio production facilities, or became involved with common rural development and missionary strategies. Although the groups sometimes strongly disagreed with one another, they have found common ground on topics of concern.

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. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact and good relations with the various religious organizations.

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