



Lesotho

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to 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 11,720 square miles, and the Government reports that its population is 2 million.

Christianity is the dominant religion. The Catholic Church estimates that approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian of which 65 percent is Roman Catholic and 25 percent is Lesotho Evangelical, Anglican, and other Christian denominations. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and members of traditional indigenous religions comprise the remaining 10 percent of the population.

While Christians can be found throughout the country, Muslims live mainly in the northeast. Most practitioners of Islam are of Asian origin, while the majority of Christians are the indigenous Basotho. Many Christians still practice their traditional cultural beliefs and rituals along with Christianity. The Catholic Church has fused some aspects of local culture into its services; for example, the singing of hymns during services has developed into a traditional call and response in Sesotho--the indigenous language--as well as English. In addition, priests dress in traditional local attire during services. The pre-Christian indigenous religion, whose priesthood is called Songoma, influences all religious practices.

Missionaries active in the country represent evangelical, traditional Protestant and Roman Catholic churches from North America, Europe, and South Africa; Muslim groups from the subcontinent; and Buddhist groups from East Asia.

The Muslim community has seven small mosques. With the assistance of the Libyan Embassy the community has been trying to build a larger mosque, training center and madrassah; however, the community claims it has been hindered by bureaucratic delays.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion and no evidence that the Government favors any particular religion.

There are four religious holy days that are also national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

The Government does not establish requirements for religious group recognition. Generally, the Government does not provide benefits to religious groups. Any religious group may apply for a waiver of taxes on charitable donations from outside the country; however, in practice few, if any, waivers are given. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the Government, regardless of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements are a constitution and a leadership

committee. Unregistered groups are not eligible for any government benefits, such as duty-free import permits for donated items or tax relief on donated funds. There are no penalties for not registering and it is common for informal church groups not to register.

According to Immigration and Labor officials, they scrutinize visas for Nigerian missionaries coming to work in Lesotho due to reports of past questionable business dealings by some Nigerian missionaries.

The strong Catholic presence led to the establishment of Catholic schools in the last century, and to their influence over education policy. However, the influence of the Catholic Church has decreased in recent years, and it now owns less than 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools. Parents are free to send their children to parochial schools of their choice; however, in practice this choice is constrained in many parts of the country by a lack of schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims is the norm. There were ecumenical efforts to promote tolerance and cooperation on social issues.

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 and local religious leaders discussed their roles in maintaining political peace and assisting with the consolidation of democracy.

Released on November 8, 2005

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)