

ANGOLA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. Muslim groups and some journalists reported security forces in July briefly detained some 50 Muslims in several provinces without provocation and demolished a mosque in Luanda province in September. The government requires religious groups to seek legal recognition by meeting rigorous criteria, but has not approved any new groups since 2004. Religious groups that did not meet the recognition requirements could generally operate and worship but faced potential difficulties with the national police and local authorities.

Some religious leaders condemned the proliferation of religious groups across the country and warned the government against granting legal recognition to Islam. Members of Protestant churches and the Catholic Church regularly engaged in religious dialogue and collaborated in several religious and charitable events throughout the year.

U.S. embassy representatives engaged government officials and religious figures on the importance of respecting freedom of religion. Embassy staff expressed concerns to government officials over the strict requirements for religious groups to gain legal recognition and charges by Muslim leaders of harassment. The embassy encouraged the government to allow all people to worship freely.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population to be 19.1 million (July 2014 estimate). According to preliminary data from the national 2014 census, the population is 24.3 million. The National Institute of Statistics, the National Institute for Religious Affairs, and some local civil society actors estimate approximately 50 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 40 percent Protestant of various denominations. The remaining 10 percent is composed of people not associated with any religion, atheists, members of indigenous religious groups, Muslims, and others. According to the government, there are an estimated 80,000 to 90,000 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants from West Africa. Anecdotal evidence suggests most Muslims are Sunni. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily Israeli citizens.

ANGOLA

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination or depriving individuals of their rights or obligations because of religious belief. It recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities as long as they “conform to the constitution and the law” and provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship. It specifies the state shall protect churches and religious groups and their places and objects of worship as long as they conform to the constitution, the law, and public order. The constitution recognizes conscientious objector status “within the law,” prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs or purposes except for anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies religious rights cannot be suspended even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from and correspond with religious counselors.

The law requires religious groups to apply for legal recognition from the state. The state currently recognizes 83 religious groups. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property collectively, use their property to hold religious events, and act as a juridical person in the court system.

In order to apply for legal recognition, a religious group must collect 100,000 member signatures from 12 of the 18 provinces and submit them to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The law also requires religious groups to submit documents defining their doctrine, organizational structure, methods of worship, and leadership, and stating the amount of time the group has operated in the country.

While the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights is responsible for registration and recognition of religious groups, oversight over religious organizations is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture through its National Institute for Religious Affairs.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system.

Government Practices

ANGOLA

Muslim groups and some journalists reported the national police detained Muslims without just cause during July. According to the reports, members of the national police temporarily detained more than 50 Muslims in Bengo, Bie, and Cabinda provinces. Members of the Muslim community said they suspected this was in response to attempts by Muslims to congregate for religious services. All detainees were released after a few hours. The national police did not confirm the detentions.

The government's requirements for religious groups to apply and obtain legal status made it difficult for some unrecognized religious groups to function freely as religious organizations and discouraged unrecognized groups from seeking recognition. Religious groups not recognized by the state were allowed to operate nonetheless, but faced operational and organizational challenges such as the denial of permits to hold public religious activities or the inability to rent venues for events. The state, which continued to recognize 83 religious groups, has not registered a new religious group since 2004, when it established the current registration requirements. No religious groups applied to register during the year.

Some members of the Muslim community believed the high threshold for obtaining legal status combined with the fact that the majority of recognized religious organizations were Christian indicated that the government opposed recognizing other religious groups. The government did not recognize any Muslim groups. The Bahai Faith and the Global Messianic Church were the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered.

The National Institute for Religious Affairs did not have legal jurisdiction over unrecognized religious groups but took steps to identify their locations and leadership in a stated effort to start a dialogue in the near future.

On September 26, government officials closed and demolished the Al-huda mosque in Viana, Luanda Province. According to Muslim leaders, the national police and officials from the provincial government said the mosque did not have the proper permit to operate as a place of worship.

The government identified more than 1,200 religious groups operating without legal status. Some of these groups had a national organizational structure and operated schools and medical facilities throughout the country. The government indicated some unrecognized religious groups had long-standing working

ANGOLA

relationships with provincial governments even though they were not legally recognized by the state.

The government extended the mandate of the interministerial Commission on Religious Affairs through the end of the year. The commission and the National Institute for Religious Affairs were working on a comprehensive study on the state of religion in the country.

In November the government launched a study in Cabinda, Uige, Luanda, and Zaire provinces of the practice among some local groups of accusing children of witchcraft. According to the government, the project included an educational component that respected traditional religious practices while encouraging greater protections for children. A task force established by the Ministry of Culture continued its efforts to combat and reduce accusations of child witchcraft.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Catholic Bishop of Benguela Province, Eugenio Dal Corso, stated on September 16 that Islam was incompatible with certain aspects of the constitution and asked the government to consider the risk of recognizing Islam as a religion in the country. Protestant religious leaders expressed similar opinions about Islam and the possibility of its legal recognition by the state.

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations publicly criticized the proliferation of smaller, non-recognized, religious groups. The two main criticisms against the newer religious groups focused on their status as breakaway sections of established religious organizations and the perception that these religious groups only sought to profit from their members. For example, on October 18, the provincial Government of Uige and the Order of Evangelical Pastors of Angola (an association of legally recognized religious organizations in Uige Province) decided in a joint conference on religious issues that all new religious groups in the province needed to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations. Some leaders of newer religious groups accused established religious organizations of corruption and lack of religious knowledge as the main causes for separation. Many leaders of established organizations said religious groups not recognized by the government should work with their “mother churches,” reconcile their differences, and reunite under one leadership. Some leaders accused unrecognized religious groups of profiteering, stating their leaders only sought to take advantage

ANGOLA

of their members by promising wealth and salvation in return for financial contributions.

Members of Protestant churches and the Catholic Church regularly engaged in religious dialogue and collaborated in several religious and charitable events throughout the year. The Council of Christian Churches of Angola, an association of Protestant churches, stated it organized some religious services commemorating national holidays with the Catholic Church. Leaders of Christian religious organizations commented it was easier to engage other Christian groups but did not dismiss the possibility of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the future. Muslim leaders said they were open to dialogue and increased religious engagement with Christian organizations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives engaged government officials and encouraged them to review the policy on religious recognition requirements. Embassy staff communicated their concerns over reports of harassment by members of the national police against the small Muslim community. Embassy staff also encouraged the government to continue its efforts to respect traditional religious beliefs while combating harmful practices affecting children, especially in the northern and diamond-producing provinces.

The embassy maintained open and regular contact with many religious groups, including some not legally recognized by the government. In private conversations and meetings, embassy staff encouraged representatives of Muslim and Christian groups to interact more frequently and seek to support each other through interfaith dialogue.