

ZAMBIA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares the country is a Christian nation while prohibiting religious discrimination and providing for freedom of conscience and religion. Government officials frequently enforced registration laws, closing at least two churches. Authorities at times disrupted prayer services to search for illegal immigrants and enforce a law regulating public gatherings. Police on several occasions attempted to prevent people from attending prayer services sponsored by civil society to pressure the government to release the new draft constitution.

Incidents of mobs attacking and killing people suspected of practicing witchcraft increased compared to the previous year. Victims were often elderly members of the community. Members of the Muslim community reported acts of intolerance. Two Muslim women were physically attacked in May when a group of young people mistakenly associated them with the Boko Haram terrorist group. Religious organizations worked closely to promote interfaith relations.

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials and religious leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, such as enforcement of registration laws and interfaith relations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 14.6 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the national government, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, slightly less than 1 percent is Muslim, and 12 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Many people combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

Of Christians, about half are Roman Catholics and half are Protestants. Among the latter, the Anglican Church and evangelical and Pentecostal groups have the largest numbers of adherents.

There are approximately 140,000 Muslims. Muslim communities are primarily concentrated in Lusaka and in the Eastern and Copperbelt Provinces and are often divided along ethnic or national lines. Many are immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired Zambian citizenship. The Somali immigrant population has increased significantly in recent years and is currently

ZAMBIA

estimated at approximately 20,000. Almost all people of Somali origin are Muslim and the majority live in Ndola and Lusaka. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim. The Bahai community consists of approximately 12,000 members, located primarily in Northwest Province. Most Hindus, approximately 10,000 nationwide, are of South Asian descent. There are also small communities of Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs; some sections of society also adhere to traditional beliefs, which at times include witchcraft.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the country is a Christian nation, but upholds freedom of conscience and religion for all persons. It prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the right of individuals to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. It protects individuals' freedom to change their religion or belief. It states no one shall be compelled to take an oath or perform acts contrary to his or her religious belief. The law prescribes legal recourse and penalties ranging from fines to prison time for violations against religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the chief registrar of societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs and pay regular statutory fees. To register, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and follow laws pertaining to labor and employment practices and criminal conduct. The chief registrar's office may consult with the police and religious umbrella organizations, called "church mother bodies," to determine a group's suitability for registration. Major church mother bodies include the Zambia Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic churches), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (evangelical Protestant churches), and the Council of Churches in Zambia (reform Protestant churches). The law allows the minister of home affairs to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure to pay registration fees or a finding by the minister that the group professes purposes or has taken or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of "peace, welfare, or good order in Zambia." Groups may appeal this finding. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members but has not pursued such penalties.

ZAMBIA

The constitution states religious groups have the right to establish and maintain private schools and to provide religious instruction to members of their religious communities. The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine; students may request education in their religion and may opt out of religious instruction if the school is not able to accommodate their request. Religious education after grade nine is optional, although not all schools offer it. Religious curriculum focuses on Christian teachings but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

Government Practices

Some religious groups stated the government indirectly violated religious freedom when conducting law-enforcement actions. On several occasions, joint teams of police, immigration, and registrar of societies' personnel interrupted prayer services of various religious groups in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces in search of illegal immigrants and to halt suspected illicit activities, such as drug smuggling. In August authorities raided 25 churches in Kitwe, apprehending several suspected illegal immigrants. In July another joint team interrupted congregants of the Free Pentecost Assemblies in Kabwata while conducting investigations into suspected illegal activities, such as abduction and sexual abuse. After concluding its investigation, the government stated it had determined these activities had occurred and banned the church. The Independent Churches of Zambia, an association of religious groups, criticized the ban, suggesting that authorities should distinguish between innocent church members and suspected criminals within a given congregation.

In September media reported the registrar of societies closed the Tower of Hope church in Lusaka for failing to register. During the year, police warned members of civil society organizations to avoid using churches to hold prayer services to press the government to release a new draft constitution. Police said that civil society's use of religious facilities was a misuse of churches and, therefore warranted the application of the Public Order Act – a colonial-era law that regulates public gatherings. Many church leaders criticized the action, noting that places of worship were not covered under the act. In Kabwe in April, police attempted to stop an Oasis Forum prayer meeting on the constitution, stating participants did not have a permit to assemble under the Public Order Act. After participants explained the purpose of the meeting, however, police left, instructing them to finish the meeting within a short time. Using the act as justification, police attempted to halt people from attending a prayer service in Choma in May.

ZAMBIA

The government and religious leaders during the year discussed how to reduce activities in churches that were illegal under the penal code, such as sexual abuse, drug smuggling, and immigration violations. The Independent Churches of Zambia urged the government to create measures that better enforced registration requirements in order to avoid illegal activity within churches.

The government's Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) did not reissue broadcast permits for some Muslim radio broadcasters, whose permits it revoked in 2013.

On December 30, the Bank of Zambia announced it had launched financial guidelines for Islamic banking. Muslim leaders praised the move, saying it increased access to financial systems for many Muslims, who sought banking options compliant with Islamic law. They stated the system was open to non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

The proposed final draft of the new national constitution, which had not been adopted at year's end, rejected a suggestion to move language deeming Zambia a Christian nation from the preamble to the bill of rights section. Both Christian and non-Christian leaders stated that including this language in the bill of rights could have led to discrimination against non-Christian faiths, despite provisions elsewhere in the draft constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion and of conscience.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Suspected practitioners of witchcraft, particularly elderly members of the community, were subject to attacks and mob violence. In January police reported that Aaron Kaunda beat his uncle Field Ngolofwani to death on suspicion that the latter practiced witchcraft. In July residents of Ndola rioted after a rumor that a local businessman was involved in the abduction and killing of children in the area for ritual purposes. In October a mob beat and lit on fire Muchinga Kabali in Bangweulu village in Samfya District on suspicion that he practiced witchcraft. Police initiated investigations into these incidents and legal actions were pending at year's end.

In July unidentified young people attacked two Muslim women in Lusaka, accusing them of belonging to Boko Haram because they were Muslim. First Lady

ZAMBIA

Dr. Christine Kaseba called the attack barbaric and stated it should not go unpunished. Police had made no arrests by year's end.

Members of the Muslim community reported acts of intolerance, stating they were mocked as “foreigners” or “terrorists.” Muslim leaders generally expressed satisfaction with the level of societal tolerance for religious diversity. Many mosques were open to non-Muslim members of local communities and some Islamic schools offered both secular and religious education to Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and to discuss national concerns. On November 9, the Zambia Interfaith Networking Group (ZINGO), consisting of the National Spiritual Association of the Bahais in Zambia, Council of Churches in Zambia, Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Hindu Association of Zambia, Independent Churches of Zambia, and the Zambia Episcopal Conference, held an interfaith gathering to pray for national unity and to honor the deceased President, Michael Sata. The ZINGO also brought together leaders from all major faiths and minority groups to address HIV and AIDS. Women's groups, such as the Zambian Women Interfaith Network, brought together Muslim and Christian women to promote mutual understanding and work toward common goals.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In July the Charge d'Affaires hosted Muslim community leaders for an iftar, discussing issues of religious tolerance. Embassy officials frequently met with and attended meetings and events hosted by government officials and religious groups to discuss topics related to religious freedom, such as enforcement of registration laws and interfaith relations.