

MOZAMBIQUE

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government's efforts to encourage religious freedom in the country were part of a broader strategy to promote human rights. These efforts included meeting with religious leaders and groups, promoting interfaith understanding by holding joint meetings with representatives of different religious groups, and hosting several events, including an iftar dinner during Ramadan.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the National Institute of Statistics 2007 census, 28 percent of the population is Roman Catholic; 27 percent is Protestant, Pentecostal, or evangelical; 18 percent is Muslim; 9 percent is divided among many small religious groups; and approximately 18 percent of the population does not profess a religion or belief. Religious leaders speculated that a significant portion of the population practiced some form of syncretic indigenous religion, a category not included in the 2007 census. Many Muslims believe their community accounts for closer to 25 percent of the population. There are small numbers of Jews, Hindus, and Baha'is.

The South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim, and there were some differences between their practices and the traditional, Sufi-inspired Swahili Islam of Muslims of African origin. Young African Muslim clerics increasingly sought training in Egypt, Kuwait, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia, and some returned with a stricter approach to Islam.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice. This is a straightforward process and there are no particular benefits or privileges associated with registration.

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 can conduct their activities without government interference.

The constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and a more recent law permits them to own and operate schools, which have increased in number. Religious instruction is the focus of these new primary and secondary schools, but this is not the case for universities associated with religious groups, which generally have students of diverse religious backgrounds. The government strictly prohibits all religious instruction in government-run schools.

The constitution prohibits political parties from directly affiliating with a religion.

The government observes "Family Day" on December 25; officially, this is a non-religious holiday that coincides with Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Despite the requirement that all groups register with the government, there were no reports that the government refused to register any religious group during the year. There were 749 religious denominations and 182 religious organizations registered with the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the year, 19 denominations and six religious organizations were registered.

The government does not officially favor a particular religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists claimed discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some Muslims believe that the two Eid festivals, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Udha (Eid al-Adha), should be made national holidays if Christmas is observed under the rubric

of family unification. The Ministry of Labor commonly declares a day's leave for Muslims to celebrate those two festivals, although it is not required by law.

While followers of all major religious groups in the country are members of the National Assembly and hold senior cabinet and media jobs, Muslims believed they held proportionally fewer of those positions than non-Muslims.

The Catholic Church and some Muslim organizations continued discussions with the government regarding land seized from religious groups after independence. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial governments, the Directorate of Religious Affairs has a mandate to address the general issue. The papal nunciature reported that the government continued to occupy properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia provinces that the Catholic Church had used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the church continued its discussions with the government for their return.

In May teachers at the community-run Fraternidade Secondary School in Pemba refused to teach classes because a student was wearing a burqa. The school suspended the student, which generated a countrywide discussion. The ministers of education and justice entered into the debate, expressing approval for the teachers' actions. While some educational authorities initially commented that wearing overtly religious symbols was not allowed in state-run schools, the Ministry of Justice later argued that the burqa is not a religious symbol, a position supported by most mainstream Muslim communities in the country. No official policy has resulted and the legality of the wearing of burqas in schools remains uncertain.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government and civil society as part of its overall practice of promoting human rights. U.S. embassy officials met with various religious groups, and the ambassador hosted several events with religious leaders, including an iftar dinner during Ramadan.