

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles and a population of 3.7 million.

Approximately 80 percent of citizens are Christian, of which an estimated 42 percent are Roman Catholic, 28 percent are Evangelical, 25 percent are Protestant, 3 percent are Kimbanguist, and 2 percent are Salvationist. An estimated 11 percent of the population is atheist, and 2 percent is Muslim. Most Muslims in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa, Lebanon, and North Africa. Animists represent less than 1 percent of the population. The remaining 6 percent of the population includes members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and other unspecified faiths. Adherents of each of the faiths live together peacefully in urban areas with no reports of intolerance.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool Region) have been associated with opposition political movements.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The constitution specifically forbids discrimination based on religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups when applying for registration; however, the process is time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners. There were no reports of religious groups being singled out in this process during the reporting period.

Religion is not taught in public schools; however, private religious schools devote class time to religious studies.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. The government does not observe Islamic holy days nationally; however, it respects them. Employers typically grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The government grants Christians and Muslims access to public facilities for religious worship in connection with Christmas and Ramadan. An interfaith committee composed of leaders of the Ecumenical Council, Islamic Council, and Evangelical Council worked to prepare and deliver a unified interfaith prayer service in conjunction with the country's celebration of 50 years of independence during the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions included highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the president, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly.