

ZAMBIA

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. Although the government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom, some citizens believe the new Patriotic Front (PF) government has shown favoritism to the Roman Catholic Church in its pronouncements and actions. This stands in sharp contrast to a pronounced and public bias against the Catholic Church by the former government that was defeated in September.

There were several reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government's primary objective in the country is to strengthen democratic institutions and foster conditions for economic growth. The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with religious leaders of all the major religions present in the country, the diplomatic community, and government officials in order to promote peaceful coexistence, human rights, democracy, and good governance, and to strengthen efforts to address HIV/AIDS.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent is Muslim or Hindu, and 7 percent adhere to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Many people practice a mix of Christianity and traditional beliefs.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent are Muslim; numerous others are Hindu. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

A 1996 amendment to the constitution declares Christianity to be the official religion of the country (while upholding the right of all persons to enjoy freedom of conscience or religion). The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion for all citizens; freedom to change religion or belief; and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other statutes provide effective remedies to address religious freedom violations.

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs. To be eligible for registration, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and display general compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are subject to a fine, and their members may be imprisoned for up to seven years.

On February 24, the Lusaka High Court terminated the registration of the Catholic Apostolic National Church, which excommunicated Catholic priest Fr. Luciano Anzanga Mbewe initially registered in 2007. The court ruling on the resulting civil case stated that the initial registration of the church was contrary to law because the name of the new organization too closely resembled that of the existing Roman Catholic Church.

The government requires Christian instruction in public schools. Religious education in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions is mandatory for all students through grade seven. From grade eight to grade twelve, religious education is offered as an optional subject in government-run schools. Islamic or other forms of religious education are not available in public schools but are offered in some private schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom; however, there were reports of discriminatory actions taken by the government in its unequal treatment of religious communities.

Michael Sata was elected president during the September 20 general elections. He became the first Catholic president. President Sata has made several public statements and actions that have been perceived by many citizens to favor Catholics.

On September 25, Sata announced that he would run the government in accordance with Catholic doctrine and the 10 biblical commandments.

On November 17, Sata appointed a 20-member committee of experts to draft a revised national constitution. Contrary to the unofficial practice--in which Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelicals are each allowed representation to such bodies--Sata deliberately excluded evangelicals and instead assigned three positions for Catholic bishops on the committee, who quietly declined the invitation. Sata rejected persistent calls by opposition political parties, civil society organizations, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia to include evangelicals on the committee.

On November 27, Sata unilaterally ordered the local authorities in Mpika District to immediately hand over Mpanda Fishala Council Guest House, previously used as a local government guest house, to Mpika Catholic Diocese so that it could be used as a home for retired Catholic priests. As the guesthouse was built with public funds, questions arose as to the propriety of its transfer to a private religious entity.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders, however, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

On January 6, neighboring villagers set ablaze a village largely inhabited by adherents of the Goshali religious group in Chongwe District, Lusaka Province, due to allegations that the Goshali were practicing Satanism. Several people were injured and at least 34 were left without shelter because of the violence. The government subsequently forcibly relocated all the members of the Goshali religious group to Southern Province. The Goshali (meaning "God Shall Live") religious group is believed to have been brought from the United States to Zambia 21 years ago. The Goshali consider themselves practitioners of "pure Christian faith" and prohibit their members from taking conventional medicine or from visiting hospitals. They instead rely on God's healing and traditional medicine.

Members of the Goshali faith do not allow their children to attend regular schools but have their own exclusive school to teach Goshali doctrine. Goshali forbid intermarriages between members and non-members.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with religious leaders of all major faiths present in the country, the diplomatic corps, and government officials in order to promote peaceful coexistence, human rights, democracy and good governance, and to strengthen the fight against HIV/AIDS.

On July 13, the ambassador met six prominent religious leaders representing the Zambia (Catholic) Episcopal Conference, the Evangelical Faith of Zambia, the Council of Churches, the Anglican Church, the Hindu Association, and the Islamic Supreme Council. The ambassador encouraged the religious leaders to continue their courageous fight against HIV/AIDS, to oppose political violence ahead of the September 20 general elections, and to play constructive roles in the event of an election dispute.

On September 2, the ambassador hosted an Eid al-Fitr dinner for representatives of the Islamic Supreme Council, the diplomatic corps, and members of the Muslim community within the U.S. mission to celebrate the conclusion of Ramadan.