

ANGOLA

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 isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and encouraged the government to permit practitioners of Islam to worship freely and build mosques in the country's communities. The U.S. government also maintained open and regular contact with various religious groups, including several that the government does not legally recognize.

Section I. Religious Demography

The majority of the population is Christian. The Roman Catholic Church estimates that 55 percent of the population is Catholic, while the government estimates 70 percent; neither figure could be verified independently. Data from the National Institute for Religious Affairs indicate that 25 percent of the population adheres to African Christian denominations (mixing Christian and traditional beliefs); 10 percent follows Protestant traditions, including Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Congregationalist (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God; and 5 percent belongs to Brazilian evangelical churches. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or indigenous religious beliefs. There is a small Muslim community, unofficially estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 adherents, the majority of whom are migrants from West Africa or of Lebanese origin. Some sources in the Muslim community put these figures much higher, although the accuracy of these estimates is questionable.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution addresses religion in two articles. Article 10 defines the country as a secular state, separating church and state. Under this article, the state recognizes and respects different religious groups, which are free to organize and carry out their activities, provided that they abide by the constitution and laws. Article 41 provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship; it also provides the right to be a conscientious objector.

The government requires religious groups to petition for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. Legal status gives religious groups the right to act as juridical persons in the court system, secures their standing as officially registered religious groups, and allows them to construct schools and churches. The Law on Religion, passed in 2004, requires that, to gain legal status, a group should have more than 100,000 members and be present in 12 of the 18 provinces. Religious leaders must provide information on their group's doctrine or philosophy, organizational structure, and physical location. The government does not formally recognize any Islamic organization.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The high membership threshold for compliance with the registration process of religious groups posed a barrier to registration. During the year, the government continued to recognize 83 religious groups; it has not recognized any new organizations since 2004. More than 900 organizations have applied for legal recognition but did not comply with all provisions of the law, and more than 2,000 organizations are believed to be operating without legal status. Nonetheless, the government generally permits these organizations to exist, function, and grow without legal recognition.

The Muslim community claimed they could not practice Islam freely because the government does not recognize Islam and selectively intervenes to close mosques, schools, or community centers.

Governmental agencies, church groups, and civil society organizations continued campaigns against indigenous religious practices that involved shamans, animal

sacrifices, or “witchcraft.” The stated goal of these campaigns was to discourage abusive practices, in particular exorcism rituals, which included willful neglect or physical abuse. According to the National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR), cases of abusive practices diminished significantly due to the campaigns and government directives.

In early January, local authorities closed ten “illegal” churches in the Maianga neighborhood of Luanda. The government indicated that these churches constrain the infrastructure of the neighborhood, specifically by creating congestion in the streets.

On November 16 local authorities in Cacuaco, Luanda Province, arrived unannounced with heavily armed guards and forcibly tore down a large tent being used as a mosque. The authorities allegedly used excessive force and intimidation, gave no written order of a violation, and offered no compensation for the destroyed structure.

In December, a Muslim group in Malange Province applied for permission to build a large, permanent mosque on land they had purchased near their small, temporary mosque. After several months of waiting without receiving a reply, and despite repeatedly asking local authorities to grant or deny their application to build, the Muslim group began construction. Shortly after construction began, local authorities arrived and destroyed the foundation. The authorities did not provide either a denial of the building application or a citation for an offense.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

The country is traditionally strongly Christian, and the Catholic Church and three protestant denominations have strong historical ties to political movements and regional ethnic groups. Churches remain a forum for political and social organization.

Many small “family churches” have opened in recent years, often with no more than a dozen members. Some observers accused the founders of these small churches of profit seeking. Critics stated the leaders of some family churches frequently exploit the poorest segment of the population and demand tens or hundreds of dollars in tithing in exchange for promises of long life, prosperity, or

miracles. Some large, international religious organizations, such as the Brazilian Universal Church of God, also received criticism for excessive commercial activity and alleged connections to money laundering. In addition, critics maintained some religious organizations create their own nongovernmental organizations with profits going to the pastors instead of helping the poor.

Immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo are frequently criticized for importing nontraditional, syncretic faiths and accused of abuse and witchcraft.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the government of the country as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and encouraged the government to allow practitioners of Islam to worship freely and build mosques in local communities.

The U.S. embassy maintained open and regular contact with various religious groups, including some not legally recognized by the government. As part of its outreach plan, the U.S. embassy held an informal gathering of religious leaders of various denominations and sects (including Muslims and representatives of all major Christian churches), providing a rare opportunity for leaders of differing religious groups to interact.