

LESOTHO

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 discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and as part of a broader engagement on human rights. The U.S. embassy's most significant engagement with religious groups and faith-based organizations related to an essential role in working toward containing and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. There are an estimated 4,000 Muslim families, 150 Hindu families, and 800 members of the Baha'i Faith; members of these three groups combined make up approximately 1 percent of the population. The remaining 9 percent of the population are members of indigenous religious groups, though exact figures are difficult to determine. Many Christians practice traditional cultural beliefs and rituals in conjunction with Christianity.

Muslim and Hindu numbers have declined in recent years due to emigration to South Africa. There are a small number of Jews but no practicing Jewish community. Muslims live primarily in the northern area of the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The government has no established requirements for religious group recognition. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the government, regardless

of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements for registration are a constitution and a leadership committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for not registering.

The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools. The Catholic Church operates an estimated 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church also operate schools.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

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. Mutual respect among all religious groups was the norm; various ecumenical efforts promoted cooperation on social matters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy engaged with religious groups and faith-based organizations as partners to assist in containing and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The embassy also worked with these groups to assist in U.S. programs to revitalize the health infrastructure, achieve sustainable and diversified economic growth, and help consolidate democracy.