

# UGANDA 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates there shall be no state religion. It provides for freedom of belief, the right to practice and promote any religion, and to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious organization in a manner consistent with the constitution. The government requires religious groups to register. The government restricted activities of religious groups it defined as “illegal” and arrested some individuals it accused of running “illegal churches.” Local nongovernmental organizations, the media, a politician, and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) all stated the government disproportionately and unfairly arrested and imprisoned Muslims and continued to discriminate against Muslims when hiring senior and lower-level officials. Former Minister of Security Henry Tumukunde accused the Uganda Police Force (UPF) of victimizing Muslims arrested in its quest to solve a spate of unresolved killings.

On October 4, media reported that Umar Mulinde, a pastor and Christian convert from Islam, complained that Muslims had broken into his house and stolen property worth 30 million shillings (\$8,100). The UPF was investigating the incident at year’s end.

The embassy brought together religious leaders to promote religious tolerance and diversity. The embassy hosted an interfaith dialogue at which a U.S. Muslim cleric urged local leaders to build interfaith collaboration to prevent violent extremism.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 40.8 million (September 2018 estimate). According to the most recent census, conducted in 2014, 39 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 32 percent Anglican, 14 percent Muslim, and 11 percent Pentecostal Christian. Other religious groups, which collectively constitute less than 5 percent of the population, include Seventh-day Adventists, adherents of indigenous beliefs, Baptists, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Jews, and those with no religious affiliation. The UMSC estimates Muslims (primarily Sunni) are closer to 25 percent of the population. According to the Indian Association in Uganda, the largest non-African ethnic population is of Indian origin or descent, most of whom are Hindu.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and establishes there shall be no state religion. It provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief, and the right to practice and promote any religion as well as to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organization in a manner consistent with the constitution. The constitution also stipulates the government may limit these rights by measures that are “reasonably justifiable for dealing with a state of emergency.” The constitution prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion.

The government requires religious groups to register to obtain legal entity status. According to the Uganda Registration Services Bureau, the government requires faith-based organizations to register as nonprofit organizations with the bureau and then to secure a five-year operating license from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Although there is no formal mechanism to request an exemption from the requirement to obtain an operating license, in practice larger religious groups, including the Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, and the UMSC are de facto exempt, and the government does not require them to obtain an operating license.

In accordance with the constitution, religious instruction in public schools is optional. The state has developed separate curricula for a number of world religions, including Christianity and Islam. Public primary and secondary schools may choose which, if any, religious studies to incorporate into their curricula; however, they must adhere to the state-approved curriculum for each religion they choose to teach.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

On October 4, local media reported the UPF arrested eight persons it accused of conducting an illegal meeting after it reportedly found them holding a nude prayer service. The UPF accused the group’s leader, Aggrey Elias Mubangizi, of operating an illegal church. The UPF released the eight without charge.

On September 26, local media reported the UPF arrested Alex Okello after he declared himself to be Jesus Christ and led 14 persons in Lira Town to drop out of

school, cease work, and sell off their property in anticipation of the end of time, which Okello indicated would occur in October. The UPF also arrested Okello's 14 followers. The UPF released Okello and the group a week later without charge.

On June 4, local media reported that the UPF cancelled an open-air prayer service organized by evangelical Christians in Iganga Town after Muslims in the area complained the event organizers ridiculed Islamic teachings. The UPF said it cancelled the service to prevent violence, saying it had received intelligence that some Muslims planned to disrupt it.

Local media, Islamic civil society organizations, and the UMSC regularly stated that the government maintained a policy of discrimination against and persecution of Muslims, and that it continued to discriminate against Muslims when hiring senior and lower-level officials. On May 21, local media reported that former Minister of Security Henry Tumukunde accused the UPF of victimizing Muslims in its quest to solve a spate of unresolved killings. Local media reported that since 2010, the UPF had arrested at least 116 individuals, of whom 106 were Muslim, in relation to high-profile killings. Local media reported the state had secured convictions of only 13 Muslim suspects since 2010 and no convictions in 2018. The UMSC said authorities did not accord Muslim detainees the same rights to bail and access to visitors as to other detainees.

The inspector general of police in May denied the UPF victimized Muslims but added that once the UPF had credible evidence of a crime committed or plans to commit crime, it would not shy away from arresting Muslim suspects for fear of offending Muslims.

A group of evangelical Christian ministers said they would resist a draft government policy to regulate religious groups once it came into force, saying it was a violation of their religious freedom. The government announced in December that the cabinet would in the same month vote on a draft policy that sought to introduce academic qualifications for religious leaders. Evangelical ministers, however, said the government's intent was to "turn every church pulpit into an NRM (National Resistance Movement) campaign platform by 2021," and warned it would "definitely have a backlash, and it will not be pretty."

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

On October 4, media reported that Umar Mulinde, a pastor and Christian convert from Islam, complained that Muslims had broken into his house and stolen

property worth 30 million shillings (\$8,100). The UPF said it would investigate the incident but did not release any findings by year's end. Mulinde had survived an acid attack in 2012, which he said his attackers carried out to avenge his conversion.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

During a May 30 iftar, the ambassador urged religious and political leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance. In August the embassy hosted an interfaith dialogue of 35 interdenominational leaders, at which a U.S. scholar and interfaith activist urged local religious leaders to cultivate meaningful, lasting connections with persons of differing beliefs in order to prevent violent extremism.