

ANGOLA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. According to the government, a series of violent clashes beginning in April between security forces and the Light of the World religious group resulted in 23 killed, including 10 police officers, and more than 110 arrests, including of the group's leader, Jose Kalupeteka, and his son. Opposition parties' accounts of the incident varied, but they said the number killed was much higher. Journalists reported security forces closed 44 churches. Muslim groups reported security forces demolished two mosques. The government requires religious groups to seek legal recognition by meeting rigorous criteria, but has not approved any new groups since 2004.

Some religious leaders condemned the proliferation of unrecognized religious groups across the country. The government and recognized churches led an effort to bring unrecognized groups together under umbrella associations, reportedly in order to promote dialogue and attain government recognition. Members of Protestant churches and the Catholic Church regularly engaged in religious dialogue and collaborated in several religious and charitable events.

U.S. embassy representatives engaged government officials on the importance of respecting freedom of religion. The embassy encouraged the government to allow all people to worship freely and to ease registration restrictions. The embassy also continued to monitor cases involving government tensions with religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 24.3 million (July 2015 estimate). The National Institute of Statistics, the National Institute for Religious Affairs, and some local civil society actors estimate approximately 50 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 40 percent Protestant, belonging to 80 registered denominations. The remaining 10 percent is composed of people not associated with any religion, atheists, members of indigenous religious groups, Muslims, and others. According to the government, there are an estimated 80,000 to 90,000 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants from West Africa. Anecdotal evidence suggests most Muslims are Sunni. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily foreigners.

ANGOLA

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination or depriving individuals of their rights or obligations because of religious belief. It recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities as long as they “conform to the constitution and the law” and provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship. It specifies the state shall protect churches and religious groups and their places and objects of worship as long as they conform to the constitution, the law, and public order. The constitution recognizes conscientious objector status “within the law,” prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than for anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies religious rights cannot be suspended even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from and correspond with religious counselors.

The law requires religious groups to register to receive legal recognition from the state. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property collectively, use their property to hold religious events, and act as a juridical person in the court system. In order to apply for legal recognition, a religious group must collect 100,000 member signatures from 12 of the 18 provinces and submit them to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The law also requires religious groups to submit documents defining their doctrine, organizational structure, methods of worship, and leadership, and state the amount of time the group has operated in the country. While the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights is responsible for registration and recognition of religious groups, oversight over religious organizations is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture through its National Institute for Religious Affairs.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system. Private schools are allowed to teach religion.

Government Practices

A series of violent clashes beginning in April between security forces and the Light of the World religious group, a breakaway group from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, resulted in 23 killed, including 10 police officers, and more than 110

ANGOLA

arrests. According to an initial government report, on April 16, when police tried to enforce an arrest warrant in Huambo Province against the group's leader, Jose Kalupeteka, members of the group launched a surprise attack on the first police officers on the scene and killed them. The government said that following these attacks the violence escalated, resulting in the death of nine police officers and 13 religious group members, and the immediate arrest of 90 group members including Kalupeteka and his son. Opposition parties had varied reports on the incident but stated the number of group members killed was much higher.

The government said that following the incident, the Ministry of Social Assistance and Reintegration provided assistance for 296 group members, 151 adults and 144 minors, to return to their homes. It also reported the recovery of weapons (firearms and machetes), munitions, vehicles, and political opposition documentation from the site. An official investigation into the events was still underway at year's end.

Additional confrontations between security forces and Light of the World members before and after April 16 led to the death of one policeman, more than 21 arrests, and eight police injured. Although nearly all arrested members of the group were released, 15, including Kalupeteka, were still in police custody awaiting trial. Kalupeteka was accused of murder, aggravated murder, resisting authorities, and arms possession. The government stated it was concerned about the proliferation of religious "sects," some of which the government said used methods that exploited the vulnerable, especially the poor, and threatened domestic stability. The government said the Light of the World group had been a concern because of practices the government considered destabilizing to social order, such as prohibiting schooling and vaccinations of its children, avoiding participation in the 2014 national census, and having members abandon their homes, sell all their belongings, and settle in isolated locations.

Muslim groups stated the national police harassed Muslims without just cause. According to reports, members of the national police stopped and demanded irregular payments from more than 30 Muslims during the year in houses, on the street, and in front of mosques to overlook documentation issues. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

ANGOLA

The government's requirement for religious groups to apply and obtain legal status made it difficult for some unrecognized religious groups to function freely as religious organizations, and the requirements also reportedly discouraged unrecognized groups from seeking recognition. Religious groups not recognized by the state were allowed to operate but faced operational and organizational challenges, such as the denial of permits to hold public religious activities or the inability to rent venues for events. Some members of the Muslim community stated they believed the high threshold for obtaining recognition, combined with the fact that the majority of recognized religious organizations were Christian, indicated that the government opposed recognizing other religious groups. The government stated some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution. The Bahai Faith and the Global Messianic Church were the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered; no Islamic groups were recognized. The state, which recognizes 83 religious groups, has not registered a new religious group since 2004, when it established the current registration requirements. No religious groups applied to register during the year.

The government identified more than 1,300 religious groups operating without legal status. Some of these groups had a national organizational structure and operated schools and medical facilities throughout the country. The government indicated some unrecognized religious groups had long-standing working relationships with provincial governments, even though they were not legally recognized by the state.

Government officials closed and demolished two mosques in the Zango and Catinton neighborhoods in Luanda Province. Media sources reported at least 52 Christian churches were closed by the government throughout the country. The government, as well as some religious leaders, stated the mosques and churches did not have the proper permits to operate as places of worship.

The Inter-ministerial Commission on Religious Affairs and the National Institute for Religious Affairs completed a comprehensive study on the state of religion in the country. This report was used in the formulation of a draft Law on Religious Freedom, Belief, and Worship proposed by the Ministry of Culture. The ministry held consultative sessions throughout the country to request feedback. According to a wide range of interested groups, while there were positive reforms in the proposed law, such as reducing the number of adherents required for recognition as

ANGOLA

a legal religious group, there were concerns with other proposals such as requiring Portuguese or national languages for religious services.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations continued to publicly criticize the proliferation of smaller, non-recognized religious groups. Newer and more established religious groups traded accusations of corruption, profiting from their members, and erroneous doctrine. Governmental organizations as well as some religious associations called for all new religious groups to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations. The government supported a move by some churches to create new umbrella religious associations to unify unrecognized churches, thus allowing them to seek government recognition. The government, however, also required that the new associations have a unified leadership and doctrine, a requirement which some religious groups said caused serious problems among groups with different methods of worship. New religious associations served as platforms for discussion and dialogue between new and mother churches, but did not address the issue of legal recognition of the new churches.

Members from Protestant and Catholic churches regularly engaged in religious dialogue and collaborated on several religious and charitable events throughout the year. Muslim leaders said they were open to dialogue and increased religious engagement with Christian organizations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Senior embassy officials remained in contact with the government on religious freedom. Religious freedom was the topic of a session at the November U.S.-Angola Human Rights Strategic Dialogue, in Washington, DC, which the Secretary of State attended. During a visit in August, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor discussed religious freedom with the government and civil society leaders.

Embassy representatives engaged government officials on the new proposed religious freedom law and encouraged them to develop regulations that developed a more inclusive space for religious expression.

ANGOLA

Embassy staff communicated their concerns over reports of harassment by members of the national police against the Muslim community, as well as over the closing and demolition of mosques and churches. The embassy continued to monitor the ongoing investigation into the violence with the Light of the World group in Huambo. The embassy maintained open and regular contact with many religious groups, including some not legally recognized by the government.