

# **CABO VERDE 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion. The law provides for freedom of religion and worship and provides for equal rights in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law requires religious groups to prove they have 500 members before they may register formally as religious groups, according them certain rights and privileges. Under a concordat with the Holy See, the government grants privileges to the Roman Catholic Church not received by other groups, including recognition of the legal status of the Catholic Church and Catholic marriages under civil law. Five public schools piloted the optional Religious and Moral Education curriculum (EMRC), produced by the Catholic Church. Some non-Catholic religious groups objected, and some parents said their children would not participate.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom and the ability to worship in prisons with government officials. Embassy representatives discussed interfaith relations with members of civil society, including religious leaders, around the country and promoted respect for religious freedom through social media. In August a U.S. military chaplain hosted local religious leaders for an interfaith discussion aboard a visiting naval vessel.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 576,000 (midyear 2019 estimate). The national government's statistics indicate 77 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, and 2 percent Muslim; 11 percent does not identify with any religion. The second-largest Christian denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other Christian denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Independent Baptists, and other Pentecostal and evangelical Christian groups. There are small Baha'i and Jewish communities.

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

## Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience, religion, and worship are inviolable and protects the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. It provides for the separation of religion and state, and it prohibits the state from imposing religious beliefs and practices on individuals. It prohibits political parties from adopting names associated with particular religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices. Under the constitution, these rights may be suspended only in a state of emergency or siege.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison. These may include discrimination against individuals for their expressed religion or lack thereof, violations of the freedom of and from religious education, denial of religious assistance in hospitals and prisons, denial of free speech to religious organizations, threats against places of worship, and violations of conscientious objection within the bounds of the law.

The law codifies the constitution's religious freedom provisions by providing for equal rights and guarantees for all religions in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law separates religion and state but allows the government to sign agreements with religious entities on matters of public interest. Specific sections of the law guarantee the protection of religious heritage, the right to religious education, freedom of organization of religious groups, and the free exercise of religious functions and worship.

A 2014 concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely. The concordat further recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law and the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and it specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts Church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the Church tax deductible.

The law requires all associations, whether religious or secular, to register with the Ministry of Justice. The constitution states an association may not be armed; be in violation of penal law; or promote violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship.

To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Failure to register does not result in any restriction of religious practice but can impinge on a religious group's ability to conduct related activities, such as importing supplies, purchasing land, and constructing places of worship. Registration provides additional benefits, including exemptions from national, regional, and local taxes and fees. Registered religious groups may receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Legally registered churches and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense. Updates to the law on religions in 2014 require religious groups to obtain the notarized signatures of 500 members before they may begin any activities related to developing their presence in the country. Failure to present the required signatures prevents religious groups from completing their formal registration process and obtaining tax-exempt status and protections to property and presence in the country.

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

### **Government Practices**

The 2014 concordat with the Holy See received attention during the summer when the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education announced that the Catholic Church prepared and would launch a curriculum on religious and moral education in the public schools. Some minority religious groups restated their previously spoken concerns that this measure strengthened the perception that the government favored the Catholic Church as the "official religion" over other religious groups.

Five public schools piloted the optional EMRC, produced by the Catholic Church per the terms of the 2014 concordat. Twelve public school and 18 Catholic school teachers participated in a 30-hour training seminar on the EMRC. Some non-Catholic religious groups and constitutional watchdogs objected to the launch of the EMRC, and some parents stated their children would not participate.

There were reports of Muslims being detained and denied entry at the country's international airports. Authorities did not provide public explanations, and reaction in the Muslim community was muted.

At least one U.S.-based Baptist group registered in the country in 2004 struggled to retain its designation because it did not have and according to sources was unlikely to achieve a membership of 500. Its previous registration was not recognized under the 2014 law because of low membership and because assurances that its existing registration would be honored under the new law were not respected by all government actors. Due to lack of registration papers and tax-free status, the group was unable to import medical supplies, purchase land for a permanent church, and establish a school. Other Baptist groups from the United States and Brazil reported similar problems.

Ministry of External Relations and Communities officials stated the country was an institution-based democracy that respected freedom of religion, including in prisons, and noted that Islamic and other religious services were available throughout the prison system.

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

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

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

Embassy officials again met with prison officials to discuss religious freedom and ability to worship for detainees.

In August a U.S. military chaplain hosted local religious leaders from the Catholic, Baptist, and Nazarene Churches, and the Church of Jesus Christ aboard a U.S. naval vessel for a discussion on religious freedom. Local religious leaders agreed to meet with the U.S. chaplain and representatives of the national military to discuss creating a chaplaincy for the country's armed forces. Muslim and other minority religious leaders were invited to the conference but did not attend.

Embassy representatives met with Catholic, Nazarene, Adventist, and other religious communities on trips around the archipelago to discuss social conditions and interfaith and religious community relations. Embassy officials spoke with civil society representatives from religious and human rights groups, as well as children's advocacy organizations, regarding religious freedom. The embassy used social media channels to broadcast its engagement with religious leaders from several different backgrounds and to publicize events linking religion and culture.

The Ambassador and Papal Nuncio Archbishop Michael Banach discussed a range of issues facing the Catholic Church, including the EMRC program and the state of religion in general.