

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and equality for all, irrespective of religious belief. It grants religious groups autonomy and the right to teach. Religious groups must register with the government.

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

U.S. embassy staff based in Gabon, in periodic visits to the country, met with key government officials and religious leaders to encourage continued respect for religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 194,000 (July 2015 estimate). The Roman Catholic bishop's office estimates that more than 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, approximately 12 percent Protestant, and less than 2 percent Muslim. Protestant groups include Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and evangelical groups, including the Evangelic Assembly of Christ, the Universal Church of Christ, and the Thokoist Church. The number of Muslims has increased over the past 10 years due to an influx of migrants from Nigeria, Cameroon, and other African countries. Some Christians and Muslims also adhere to aspects of indigenous beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. It provides for equality of rights and obligations irrespective of religious belief or practice and for freedom of religious groups to teach and to organize themselves and their worship activities. According to the constitution, these rights are to be interpreted in harmony with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and may only be restricted in cases envisaged in the constitution and or suspended during a state of emergency or siege declared according to the terms of the constitution and the law.

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Religious groups must register with the government. To register, a group must send a letter requesting authorization to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ). Once the group obtains authorization, it must submit the following package to a notary public: the MOJ's approval letter; the group's statutes; the minutes or report from a meeting attended by representatives of the group and signed by its president and secretary; copies of the national identity cards of those who attended this meeting; a list of board members; and a certificate from the registrar's office attesting that no existing organization has the same name. After payment of applicable notarial fees, an announcement is published in the government gazette and the group can then operate fully as a registered group without any restrictions. Once registered, a religious group does not need to register again.

Government Practices

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

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

There is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the country. U.S. embassy staff engaged with government officials, the Roman Catholic bishop, evangelical religious leaders, and an imam to discuss religious freedom.