

LESOTHO 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.9 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. The remaining 10 percent is Muslim, Hindu, or Bahai or belong to indigenous or other religious groups. Many Christians practice traditional rituals in conjunction with Christianity. Muslim and Hindu numbers are declining due to emigration to South Africa. Although there are a small number of Jews, there is no synagogue for worship; services are held across the border in South Africa. Muslims live primarily in the northern area of the country.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa, South Asia, and China constitute less than 1 percent of the population. No statistics are available on their religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The constitution protects freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and of religion, the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion.

The government has no established requirements for recognition of religious groups. By law any group may register with the government, regardless of its purpose. The requirements for registration are a constitution and a leadership

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committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for not registering.

The education ministry pays and certifies all teachers, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and religious schools. Churches own and operate about 80 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Roman Catholic Church, the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church are the primary operators of religious schools. Since the introduction of free primary education in 2000, the education ministry has built new non-denominational schools, reducing the proportion of religiously affiliated public schools.

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 societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Mutual respect among all religious groups was the norm.

A local, privately-owned radio station continued to call on the government to amend the constitution to make Christianity the official state religion. The government made no move to amend the constitution.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contact with religious leaders, including with representatives from the Christian Council of Lesotho, an umbrella organization of five Christian churches.