

# **ZAMBIA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and most other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Though most religious groups practiced freely, the government revoked the registration of one religious group and appealed a court decision overturning its 2012 deregistration of another group.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of the Muslim community reported occasional acts of intolerance, and practitioners of witchcraft were subject to persecution and mob violence.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the leaders of all major religious groups, the diplomatic community, and government officials.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 14.2 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, less than 1 percent is Muslim, and 12 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Many people combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

Of Christians, about half are Roman Catholics and half are Protestants. Among the latter, the Anglican Church and evangelical and Pentecostal groups have the largest numbers of adherents.

There are approximately 140,000 Muslims. Muslim communities are primarily concentrated in Lusaka and in the Eastern and Copperbelt provinces. Many are immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired Zambian citizenship. Somali immigration has increased significantly in recent years; the Somali community is estimated at around 20,000, with a majority living in Ndola and Lusaka. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim. The Bahai community consists of approximately 12,000 members, located primarily in Northwest Province. Most Hindus, approximately 10,000 nationwide, are of South Asian descent. There are also small communities of Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs.

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

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### **Legal/Policy Framework**

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

The constitution declares Christianity the official religion of the country, while upholding the right of freedom of conscience or religion for all persons. The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion for all citizens, freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other laws address violations against religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the Chief Registrar of Societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs and pay regular statutory fees. To register, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and follow laws pertaining to labor and employment practices and criminal conduct. The Chief Registrar's office may consult with the police and religious umbrella organizations, called "mother bodies," to determine a group's suitability for registration. The government may revoke the registration of religious groups that it finds to be in violation of these guidelines or that fail to pay registration fees. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members but has not pursued such penalties.

The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine. Religious education after grade nine is optional, although not all schools offer it. Religious education focuses on Christian teachings but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

### **Government Practices**

In September the Lusaka High Court ordered the Chief Registrar of Societies to reinstate the House of Joy Church, which the registrar had deregistered in 2012 on grounds that the church had engaged in criminal activities and had failed to pay the required registration fees. A member of the church's clergy was accused of being involved in the murder of a 19-year old student in 2012, which many believed to be a ritual killing. At year's end, the clergyman's case was before a local magistrate's court. The High Court found the government's deregistration action in this case to be excessive because it penalized the church as a whole for the

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alleged action of only one of its members. The government appealed the High Court's decision.

In May the Chief Registrar of Societies revoked the registration of the Sweetheart of Nimbi Church after the Times of Zambia, a government-owned newspaper, published an article that accused the church of promoting nudity and sexual relations among its members. Church members denied the accusations. According to a government investigation, the church had been recommended for deregistration in 1999 for submitting false information, but the government had not carried out the recommendation.

The government and religious leaders met during the year to discuss mutual concerns about the increase of "illegitimate" religious groups (i.e., groups not sanctioned by established religious institutions) and "self-professed" clergy, who were allegedly charging fees for prayers and rituals. In October the Chief Registrar of Societies warned that clergy who engaged in extortion risked having their churches deregistered.

In September the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), whose board is appointed by the government, announced that it would suspend the granting of permits for Islamic religious radio programming until the IBA had consulted with the government, Muslim civil society, and other stakeholders. The IBA Chairman and Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting indicated a desire to develop guidelines for Muslim radio broadcasting before continuing to grant permits. Muslim organizations with permits continued to broadcast radio programs without interference. The IBA did not impose similar restrictions on Christian or other religious groups.

In July the minister of gender officiated at the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Banani International Secondary Girls' School in Chisamba, which is run by the Bahai community. In August the Ministry of Tourism and Arts worked with the Makeni Islamic Society Trust to facilitate worship and support visiting Muslim delegates to the United Nations World Tourism Organization's 20th conference. The government invited leaders from minority religious groups to state funerals and other official functions. The government also met frequently with different religious groups, often holding interdenominational meetings and events.

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

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There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Practitioners of witchcraft were subject to persecution and mob violence. In February Chieftaness Malembeka of Mpongwe District expelled eight alleged practitioners of witchcraft from her chieftom. The accused, who reportedly confessed to using magic for personal gain, included four Congolese women who were subsequently deported. On August 13, John Chibuye of Serenje was axed to death by his son and nephew on suspicion that he had been practicing witchcraft.

Members of the Muslim community reported occasional acts of intolerance, stating that they were mocked as being “foreigners” or “terrorists.” Muslims leaders generally expressed satisfaction with the level of societal tolerance for religious diversity. Many mosques were open to non-Muslim members of local communities and some Islamic schools offered both secular and religious education to Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and to discuss national concerns. The Zambia Interfaith Networking Group brought together leaders from all major faiths and minority groups to address HIV and AIDS. Women’s groups, such as the Zambian Women Interfaith Network, brought together Muslim and Christian women to promote mutual understanding and work toward common goals.

Some Muslim leaders expressed concern in ongoing constitutional reform discussions that retaining references to Zambia as a Christian nation could alienate non-Christians and lead to potential discrimination. Some Christian groups said that Christian references in the constitution’s bill of rights were unnecessary but others stated that keeping the references would not interfere with the practice of other faiths.

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

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with religious leaders, the diplomatic community, and government officials. Embassy officials met with religious leaders to discuss how ongoing constitutional reform would affect religious freedom.