

ZIMBABWE 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, there was a positive change in the government's respect for religious freedom. There continued to be restrictions, however, on public gatherings and individuals, including occasionally of religious groups and their members perceived to be critical of the government.

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

The U.S. embassy engaged government officials, religious leaders and faith-based organizations in support of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.2 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), 84 percent of the population is Christian. The EFZ's 2004 census estimates the Christian population is 33 percent Catholic; 42 percent evangelical or Pentecostal; 17 percent Anglican, Methodist, or Presbyterian; and 8 percent Apostolic. There are a significant number of independent Pentecostal and syncretic African churches.

The majority of the population also adheres to indigenous religions. Religious leaders reported a continued increase in observance of indigenous religious practices, often simultaneously with Christianity. Approximately 14 percent of the population adheres solely to indigenous religious beliefs.

Approximately 3 percent of the population is Muslim, primarily immigrants of Mozambican and Malawian descent. The Muslim population is concentrated in rural areas and in some high-density suburbs. Small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais make up less than 1 percent of the population.

Political elites tend to be members of established Christian mainstream or Pentecostal churches. Some Apostolic groups support the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and are especially prevalent in ZANU-PF political strongholds.

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Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and most other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion as well as privately or publicly to manifest and propagate their religion through worship, teaching, practice, and observance.

The 2002 Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association. While POSA exempts religious activities and events, the government has categorized as political any public gathering, including religious gatherings, critical of ZANU-PF.

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department, which generally grants these requests.

The Education Ministry sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on Christian religious groups but covering other religious groups, emphasizing the need for religious tolerance. Religious education is generally optional in secondary schools. The government does not regulate religious education in private schools but approves employment of headmasters and teachers.

Government Practices

The government continued to invoke POSA to prevent or disrupt public gatherings. Compared to previous years, it rarely targeted the public events and prayer rallies of religious groups. There were a few unconfirmed reports that some religious gatherings in rural areas were targeted.

After a November 2012 court decision favorable to the Anglican Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA), which resolved a six-year dispute over ownership of church properties between the CPCA and an excommunicated bishop who had founded his own church, there was a modestly positive change in the status of the government's respect for religious freedom. There was a continued

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decrease in government monitoring or harassment of religious leaders, religiously-affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and their members who criticized the government.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included nondenominational Christian prayers.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, and practice, although tensions between some Christian churches and indigenous Christian groups on issues of polygamy, modern medicine, education, and political exclusion continued.

As in the previous year, some Christian groups blamed indigenous Christian groups, particularly the Apostolic community in Marange, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates in the community by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging polygamy with young girls. Civil society groups and health NGOs continued to reach out to the Apostolic community in Marange and other areas on this issue to mitigate the concerns. Religious leaders from a wide spectrum of groups continued to discuss these matters productively in interfaith council meetings, where Christian groups were in the strong majority.

Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist churches continued to build and operate primary and secondary schools. The United Methodist, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches all operated private universities. Christian schools, the majority of which were Catholic, constituted one-third of all schools. Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish groups operated primary and secondary schools in major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo. Many private religious schools were religiously diverse and welcomed students from different faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials and with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom.

The embassy hosted a “What is Ramadan?” program to encourage religious tolerance and education. The embassy also brought a professor of religious studies

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from the United States who hosted an interfaith roundtable on religious pluralism, as well as tolerance, diversity, civil society, and social cohesion. The embassy invited a mix of religious leaders to a reception for a gospel-themed show sponsored by the embassy during the Harare International Festival of Arts to promote unity among different religious groups.