

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination, provides for freedom of religion, bans the use of religion for political ends, and stipulates impositions on freedom of conscience stemming from “religious fanaticism” shall be punishable by law. The government required religious groups to register and approved all eight registration applications submitted by religious groups during the year.

There were unconfirmed reports of private expressions of concern by some religious leaders over the potential for religious tensions resulting from the rapid increase in the Muslim population due to conversions and an influx of refugees from neighboring Central African Republic. Catholic and Muslim leaders, however, said they had not received any reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against the Islamic community.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom in interactions with leaders in the government, civil society, and several religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 4.7 million (July 2014 estimate). A 2012 survey by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, Territorial Management, and Integration estimates more than 32 percent of the native-born population is Roman Catholic, 55 percent Protestant (of which approximately 33 percent belongs to evangelical churches), and 2 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (Kimbanguist), Salvation Army, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). An estimated 2 percent of the population is atheist. A significant portion of the population combines traditional beliefs and practices with Christianity or other religious beliefs.

Many residents not included in government statistics are foreign workers from predominantly Muslim countries. There has also been a recent influx of Muslim refugees, particularly from the Central African Republic. According to a study conducted in May and cited in the *Les Depeches de Brazzaville* newspaper, the High Islamic Council of the Congo (CSIC) estimates there are 800,000 Muslims,

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of which 15 percent are citizens. Counting the immigrant community, the total Muslim population may be closer to 15 percent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of belief, prohibits religious discrimination, and makes forced impositions on conscience based on “religious fanaticism” punishable by law. It bans the use of religion for political ends and political parties affiliated with a particular religious group.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with and be approved by the minister of the interior. Religious group applicants must present a certification of qualifications to operate a religious establishment, a title to the land and exact address where the organization will be located, bylaws, and a document that clarifies the mission and objectives of the organization. Once registered, groups do not need to reregister when expanding their organizations. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation of foreign group members.

Public schools do not teach religion, but private religious schools may do so. The constitution protects the right to establish private schools.

Government Practices

The Ministry of the Interior received eight registration applications from new religious organizations and approved all eight.

The government donated a parcel of land on a major thoroughfare in Brazzaville for the construction of a mosque funded by the government of Qatar.

The government granted Christians and Muslims access to public facilities for special religious events.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Les Depeches de Brazzaville cited the vice president of the CSIC as saying the Muslim community was growing rapidly, with 50 new converts each week. He

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attributed the growth in part to vigorous outreach efforts by the Muslim community, including radio and television broadcasts. Although there were unconfirmed reports private citizens had expressed concerns about the potential for rising tensions because of the rapid growth of the Muslim population, Muslim and Catholic leaders stated they had not received any reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against the Islamic community.

Dozens of churches expanded their presence in the country, according to information published in the government's Official Journal.

The Ecumenical Council, representing the Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist Churches, met at least biweekly. The Revivalist Council, representing evangelical Protestant churches, and the Islamic Council each met at least twice during the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom in interactions with the government and civil society. In July, August, and October embassy officials met separately with Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim leaders to discuss the state of religious tolerance and cooperation, and to reaffirm the U.S. government's commitment to religious freedom.