

NAMIBIA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of belief and the right to practice, profess, and promote any religion. The government included religious leaders in national events and periodic policy discussions.

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

U.S. embassy officials engaged with religious groups and leaders to discuss religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.2 million (July 2014 estimate). Although there are no official statistics on religious affiliation, religious leaders report approximately 90 percent of the population identifies as Christian. Religious leaders estimate 60 percent of Christians identify as Lutheran, 20 percent as Catholic, and 10 percent as Anglican. Other denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, evangelicals, charismatics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia, make up the remaining 10 percent of the Christian population. The number of Pentecostal churches is growing, primarily in the northern Zambezi Region. A number of Zionist churches combine Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Muslims, Bahais, Jews, Buddhists, and atheists together constitute approximately 10 percent of the population and reside primarily in urban areas.

Members of the Dutch Reformed Church are predominantly ethnic Afrikaners. Many members of the Himba and San ethnic groups combine indigenous religious beliefs with Christianity. Muslims are mostly Sunni and are predominantly immigrants from elsewhere in Africa or recent converts.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution specifies the country is a secular state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of thought, conscience and belief, as well as the right to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain, and promote any religion.

The law allows recognition of any religious group through formal registration. Religious groups are not required to register; however, registered groups are eligible for tax benefits. Religious and non-religious groups may register as nonprofit organizations with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Under the law, a nonprofit organization must have a minimum of seven members and two directors, an auditor, a registered address in the country, and must comply with all regulations of domestic corporate law. Religious groups may also register as welfare organizations with the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS). Under the MoHSS regulations, a welfare organization must have a minimum of seven members, an auditor, and a constitution. If the group meets the objectives of a welfare organization, the MoHSS will issue a letter of certification. There is no difference in the application process between religious and non-religious groups. A welfare organization may apply to the Department of Inland Revenue to receive tax-exemption status. Once registered as a welfare organization, a religious group may seek to obtain communal land at a reduced rate, which is at the discretion of traditional authorities or town councils, based on whether they believe the organization's use of the land will benefit the community.

The constitution permits the establishment of private schools provided no student is denied admission based on creed.

Government Practices

The government periodically included religious leaders in discussions regarding issues affecting the country and in national events such as state funerals. In March the government held a National Day of Prayer against gender-based violence and requested religious leaders from all faiths participate in the event. The president held annual consultations with religious leaders to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

The University of Namibia and the Polytechnic University in Windhoek, both government-supported institutions, provided rooms to religious groups, such as Muslim and Bahai students, to use for prayer and meetings.

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

U.S. embassy representatives met with religious leaders and communities to better understand the country's religious landscape and any potential issues of discrimination.