

SEYCHELLES 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds as well as laws establishing any religion. It provides for freedom of religion, including the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religion. The government bars religious groups from owning radio or television stations. It granted larger religious groups programming time on state radio, subject in most cases to advance review and approval. Smaller religious groups did not have access to dedicated broadcast time. Although the constitution prohibits compulsory religious education, non-Catholic students in public schools providing Catholic instruction did not have access to alternative activities during those classes.

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

The U.S. embassy based in Mauritius monitored religious freedom and raised issues of media access for religious groups with government officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 92,000 (July 2014 estimate). Approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is Anglican. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hindus, Muslims, and Bahais are present in small numbers. The Seychelles News Agency reported a growth in the number of Muslims and members of Christian denominations other than Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds, except "as necessary in a democratic society," as well as laws making provisions for the establishment of any religion or imposing any religious observance. It provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the right of individuals to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate their religion in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, alone or in community with others, and in public or private. These rights may be subject to limitations to protect public order, safety,

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morality, or the health or rights of others. The constitution also prohibits compulsory religious education or participation in religious ceremonies in schools but permits religious groups to provide religious instruction. It stipulates individuals shall not be required to take a religious oath counter to their religious beliefs or profess any religion as a prerequisite for public office.

The law requires registration for all religious groups. The government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, mosques, and the Bahai local spiritual assembly by individual acts of incorporation. Other religious groups with fewer assets have opted not to apply for recognition as corporate bodies and are registered as associations with the Registrar of Associations. To apply for registration as an association, a group must submit to the registrar its name, location, rules, and list of assets; the name, occupation, and addresses of officers and members; and the resolution appointing its officers. A minimum of seven members is required in order to register an association. In order to receive tax privileges, religious groups must also register with the finance ministry.

As the regulating body for both religious and secular associations, the Registrar of Associations recognizes 54 religious associations. Although no penalties are prescribed for unregistered groups, only those registered as corporate bodies or associations have legal status and the right, for example, to petition the government for broadcast time for religious programming or provide spiritual counsel in prisons.

The law prohibits religious groups from obtaining radio or television licenses. The government provides broadcast time to religious groups on the national radio broadcasting service. Access is granted based on the size of each group's membership. Religious groups may publish newspapers.

Government Practices

The government prohibited live broadcasts of all religious programming, with the exception of radio broadcasts, lasting up to 90 minutes each, of Catholic masses and Anglican worship services on alternate Sundays. The government-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation reviewed and approved all other religious programming to ensure "hate speech" was not broadcast. This programming consisted of 15-minute, prerecorded prayer broadcasts, allowed to Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, and Anglican groups every two weeks.

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Smaller religious groups protested that the government did not grant them their own dedicated radio broadcast time.

Most state schools operated on land leased by the Catholic Church and Catholic instruction was part of the curriculum. Non-Catholic students reportedly were often relegated to the back of the classroom during religious instruction and were not offered any alternative activities during that time.

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

Embassy staff based in Mauritius monitored religious freedom issues and, in meetings with government officials, raised the importance of the right of religious groups to disseminate their messages.