

CABO VERDE 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion. The law provides for freedom of religion and worship and provides for equal rights in accordance with the constitution and international law. The government grants privileges to the Roman Catholic Church not received by other groups, under a 2014 concordat with the Holy See. This agreement, among other things, recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law. Muslim community leaders expressed concerns regarding the “nonlegalization” of mosques in the country, and restrictions on their ability to visit prisons Fridays in order to meet with Muslim prisoners for prayers.

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

The U.S. embassy reiterated the importance of respecting religious freedom in discussions with government officials and members of civil society, including religious leaders, and through use of social media.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 553,000 (July 2016 estimate). The national government’s statistics indicate 77 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, 2 percent Muslim, and 1 percent does not identify with any religion. The second largest Christian denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other Christian denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Bahai and Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience, religion, and worship are inviolable rights and protects the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion, and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. It provides for

the separation of religion and state and prohibits the state from imposing religious beliefs and practices on individuals. It prohibits political parties from adopting names associated with particular religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices. Rights may only be suspended in a state of emergency or siege under the constitution.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison.

The law codifies the constitution's religious freedom provisions by providing for equal rights and guarantees for all religions in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law separates religion and state, but allows the government to sign agreements with religious entities on matters of public interest. Specific sections of the law guarantee the protection of religious heritage, the right to religious education, freedom of organization of religious groups, and the free exercise of religious functions and worship.

A 2014 concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely. The concordat further recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law, the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts Church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the Church tax deductible.

The law requires all associations, whether religious or secular, to register with the Ministry of Justice. The constitution states an association may not be armed; be in violation of penal law; or promote violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship. To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Failure to register does not result in any restriction of religious practice, but registration provides additional benefits such as exemptions from national, regional, and local taxes and fees. Registered religious groups may receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Legally registered churches

and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government continued to grant privileges to the Catholic Church that other groups did not receive including in educational institutions, in government facilities, and in access to media. Some minority religious groups said this practice strengthened the perception the government favored the Catholic Church as the “official religion” over other religious groups. The government used Catholic Church representatives to inaugurate public buildings throughout the country. Public television transmitted religious programming paid for by the Catholic Church, most of which was of Catholic services. A Brazilian-owned television network (TV Record) covered the religious activities of the Universal Church. Other religious groups received minimal TV broadcast time reportedly because they did not request it or had no means to pay for it.

Muslim community leaders expressed concerns regarding the “nonlegalization” of mosques in the country, referring to the cases of individuals intending to open mosques in their residences and mentioned the existence of some restrictions when requesting visits to prisons in order to meet with Muslim prisoners. Prison authorities did not grant some requests to visit on Fridays to meet with prisoners and hold Friday prayers. Muslim leaders stated the registration process was straightforward.

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 promoted religious freedom in discussions with government officials at all levels, including the minister of parliamentary affairs (responsible for issues related to religion). After meeting with Islamic community representatives, embassy officials addressed issues raised in the meeting, including establishment of mosques and prison visits, with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice. The embassy also spoke with civil society representatives regarding religious freedom. Embassy representatives reiterated

the importance of respecting religious freedom in formal meetings with the Catholic Church, the Muslim community, and the Church of the Nazarene, among others. The embassy also used social media channels to raise awareness about the need to protect religious freedom.