

MOZAMBIQUE 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the right to practice or not to practice religion freely and prohibits discrimination based on religion. These and other rights may temporarily be suspended or restricted only in the event of a declaration of a state of war, siege, or emergency. The constitution prohibits faith-based political parties and the use of religious symbols in politics. Religious groups have the right to organize, worship, and operate schools. On June 14, police arrested three citizens in Cabo Delgado based on their engagement in Islamic extremist activities, including distributing materials that rejected the authority of secular government authorities, advocated against modern education, and called for discrimination against women. On October 5, a group of Islamic militants in Cabo Delgado Province attacked police and district government facilities, reportedly killing at least two police officers. According to international reports, on November 28, the government ordered the closure of three mosques in Pemba, stating the mosques were connected with individuals linked to the deadly attacks in October. A Catholic Church representative said authorities in certain provinces required some dioceses to register locally in what he said was a violation of a 2012 agreement between the central government and the Holy See. The Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches reported no progress in their efforts to regain property the government seized following independence. In April the National Tax Authority announced that religious activities that generated a profit would no longer receive tax-exempt status.

The 2016 fatal shooting of Apostolic Faith Mission Pastor Joao Jofrisse in the central city of Chimoio remained unsolved. Religious leaders at a national seminar on preventing premature marriages rejected the practices of pastors of some religious congregations who encouraged the use of virgin girls as debt payments incurred by their parents. One such congregation in Zambezia Province closed.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and the return of seized church property with the justice minister and the national director of religious affairs. Embassy representatives also discussed the importance of religious tolerance with Catholic Church representatives and Islamic religious leaders in the provinces of Tete, Sofala, Nampula, Cabo Delgado, and Zambezia.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 26.6 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the U.S. government, 28 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 18 percent Muslim (mostly Sunni), 15 percent Zionist Christian, 12 percent Protestant, and 7 percent other religious groups, including the Bahai Faith, Judaism, and Hinduism. Approximately 18 percent do not profess any religion or belief. According to Christian and Muslim religious leaders, a significant portion of the population adheres to syncretic indigenous religious beliefs, characterized by a combination of African traditional practices and aspects of either Christianity or Islam, a category not included in government estimates. Muslim leaders state their community accounts for 25-30 percent of the total population, a statistic frequently reported in the press.

The country conducted a census during the year that includes questions on religious affiliation. As of the end of the year, the full census was not released.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular state. It prohibits religious discrimination, provides for the right of citizens to practice or not practice a religion, and stipulates that no individuals may be deprived of their rights because of religious faith or practice. Political parties are constitutionally prohibited from using names or symbols associated with religious groups. The constitution protects places of worship and the right of religious groups to organize, worship, and pursue their religious objectives freely and to acquire assets in pursuit of those objectives. It recognizes the right of conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons. These and other rights may temporarily be suspended or restricted only in the event of a declaration of a state of war, siege, or emergency, in accordance with the terms of the constitution.

The law requires all nongovernmental organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs (MOJ). Under the law, “religious organizations” are charities or humanitarian organizations, whereas “religious groups” refer to particular denominations. Religious groups register at the denominational level or congregational level if they are unaffiliated. Religious groups and organizations register by submitting an application, providing identity documents of the local leaders, and submitting documentation of declared ties to

any international religious group or organization. There are no penalties for failure to register; however, religious groups and organizations must show evidence of registration to open bank accounts, file for exemption of customs duties for imported goods, or submit visa applications for visiting foreign members.

An accord between the national government and the Holy See governs the Catholic Church's rights and responsibilities in the country. The agreement recognizes the Catholic Church as a "legal personality" and recognizes the Church's exclusive right "to regulate ecclesiastical life and to nominate people for ecclesiastical posts." The agreement requires Catholic Church representatives to register with the government to benefit from the Church's status. The accord also gives the Catholic Church the exclusive right to create, modify, or eliminate ecclesiastical boundaries; however, it stipulates that ecclesiastical territories must report to a Church authority in the country.

The law permits religious organizations to own and operate schools. The law forbids religious instruction in public schools.

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

Government Practices

On June 14, police arrested three citizens in Cabo Delgado based on their engagement in Islamic extremist activities, including distributing materials that rejected the authority of secular government authorities, advocated against modern education, and called for discrimination against women. Those arrested described themselves as followers of "Al-Shabab"; however, according to observers any direct links were unlikely. Islamic religious leaders publicly distanced themselves from these actions, stating they deemed the beliefs expressed to be inconsistent with Islam.

According to reports, on October 5, 30-50 armed persons attacked police and district government facilities in Mocimboa da Praia, in Cabo Delgado. The group was referred to locally as "Al-Shabab" or "Ahl-el-Sunnah." Observers said that direct ties to foreign terrorist organizations were unlikely. Reports indicated that at least two police officers and significantly more attackers were killed. Local observers reported that security forces significantly increased their presence in the area and that outwardly observant Muslims feared being targeted for harassment as part of the ensuing investigation and security operation. Local Islamic religious

leaders issued a formal statement condemning the attacks in Mocimboa da Praia, deeming such violent activities as inconsistent with Islam.

According to international reports, on November 20, the government ordered the closure of three mosques in Pemba after the deadly attacks in October. Provincial Official Alvaro Goncalves stated that the closures “only affect mosques that had some contact with the group involved in the events in Mocimboa da Praia.”

The MOJ registered 22 new religious groups and seven new religious organizations between January and September. There were a total of 881 religious groups and 226 religious organizations registered. There were no reports of difficulty with religious groups registering.

A Catholic Church representative said provincial authorities in certain provinces violated the 2012 accord with the Holy See by requiring local dioceses to register with local authorities separately or present some form of proof of previous registration. The Catholic Church continued to pursue the return of property the government seized following independence. There was no movement in the return of the remaining properties; however, negotiations continued at year’s end.

The Greek Orthodox Church reported no progress in its efforts to obtain the return of the Ateneu (Athenaeum), a church property in central Maputo seized by the government after independence and renamed the Palácio dos Casamentos (Wedding Palace).

In April the national director of the Tax Authority announced that organizations affiliated with religious denominations conducting activities generating profits, such as schools and day-care facilities, would be subject to taxation. Until April these activities had been tax exempt, if a religious order applied for a waiver.

In July President Filipe Nyusi questioned the line between religion and politics during a visit to the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs, saying, “I would not like the religion of my country to be confused with politics... But if the new way of doing religion is this, we will have difficulties, as a country, reaching a conclusion.” Journalists said the remarks were intended to send a message to churches that had taken positions on political issues and were prompted by the Catholic bishops’ stand on the country’s “hidden” debt, referring to a debt scandal involving large, undeclared loans to state-owned companies. Some diplomatic observers stated they believed the president might have also had in mind the recent challenges in the north of the country, since his comments

followed shortly after the arrest of the three citizens engaged in what the government stated were Islamic extremist activities, including a call to reject of the authority of secular government authorities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The fatal 2016 shooting of Apostolic Faith Mission Pastor Joao Jofrisse during a church service in his home in the central city of Chimoio remained unsolved with no suspects identified.

In February religious leaders at a national seminar on preventing premature marriages condemned the practices of pastors of some religious congregations who encouraged the use of virgin girls as debt payments incurred by their parents, including debts to pastors or to traditional healers for services rendered. Speakers at the seminar highlighted a specific religious congregation in the central province of Zambezia that had a large number of pregnant young girls in the congregation. According to reports, religious leaders from the congregation in Zambezia were involved in the abuse, and the congregation subsequently closed.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and the return of seized property with the justice minister and the national director of religious affairs. Through a series of outreach initiatives, the Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed the importance of religious tolerance to promote peace and security with representatives of different religious denominations. These included several iftars during Ramadan attended by members of Islamic civil and religious society. Embassy officers also discussed the status of religious freedom and expressed U.S. government support for this fundamental right with Catholic and Muslim leaders in Tete, Sofala, Nampula, and Zambezia Provinces.