

NAMIBIA 2017 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. Some religious groups noted the difficulty of obtaining work visas for foreign religious workers; however, they also noted that all organizations were subject to strict visa enforcement and this policy was not targeted at religious groups.

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 2.5 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 97 percent of the population identifies as Christian. According to church statistics and the government's 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, approximately 50 percent identify as Lutheran and 20 percent as Catholic. Other groups, including Anglican, various Reformed denominations, Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, evangelicals, charismatics, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), make up the remaining 27 percent of the population that is Christian. The number of Pentecostal and charismatic churches is growing. Some Zionist churches combine Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Muslims, Bahais, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and other non-Christians together constitute approximately 3 percent of the population and reside primarily in urban areas.

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, South Asia, 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. These rights may be subject to “reasonable restrictions” justified by interests such as “the sovereignty and integrity of Namibia, national security, public order, decency, or morality.”

The law allows recognition of any religious group as a voluntary association, without the need to register with the government. Religious groups may also register as nonprofit organizations (an “association without gain”) with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Both religious groups registered as nonprofit organizations, and religious groups formed as voluntary associations are exempt from paying taxes. A welfare organization may apply to the Department of Inland Revenue to receive tax-exempt 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 religious groups to establish private schools provided no student is denied admission based on creed. The government school curriculum contains a nonsectarian “religious and moral education” component that includes education on moral principles and human rights and introduces students to a variety of African traditions and religions, as well as world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Bahai Faith, and Rastafarianism.

Similar to other foreigners seeking to work in the country, religious workers must obtain an appropriate visa.

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

Government Practices

The government periodically included religious leaders in discussions regarding issues affecting the country and in national events. President Hage Geingob held consultations with leaders from major religious groups in the country, including from various Christian denominations and from the Muslim community, to discuss opportunities for collaboration in fighting poverty.

The Namibian Islamic Judicial Council stated that in contrast to deportations of Muslims in 2016 for working without a work visa, there had been “no persecution” against Muslims on the part of the government during the year.

Echoing problems raised by nonreligious organizations, some religious groups noted they had difficulty in obtaining work visas for foreign coreligionists and religious workers to enter the country to engage in religious activities. According to the groups, however, the government also strictly enforced work visa requirements for nonreligious, nontourist foreign visitors, and they stated they did not believe they were targeted based on religion.

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 and Engagement

U.S. embassy representatives met with religious leaders from the Christian, Bahai, and Muslim communities to better understand the country’s religious landscape and any potential problems of discrimination such as difficulties in obtaining visas for religious workers.