

SEYCHELLES 2018 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. Through the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act, the government continues to bar religious groups from owning and operating radio or television stations; however, it continued to grant larger religious groups programming time on state-funded radio, subject in most cases to advance review, editing, 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. The government regularly consulted with an interfaith grouping, the Seychelles Interfaith Council (SIFCO), on national issues such as prison reform. Members of SIFCO were appointed to various government boards.

SIFCO hosted an interfaith forum in February as part of its activities to mark World Interfaith Harmony Week. The forum included presentations by representatives of the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Baha'i faiths. Following the forum, SIFCO officials commented on the challenges to interfaith harmony and the progress made compared with the past.

The U.S. embassy in Mauritius monitored religious freedom in Seychelles and regularly engaged with government officials and civil society to promote freedom of religious expression.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 94,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to the 2010 census, approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include Anglicans (6 percent), Hindus (2.4 percent), and Muslims (1.6 percent). Smaller religious groups include Baha'is and Christian groups such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds and forbids any laws establishing any religion or imposing any religious observance. The constitution permits limitations on freedom of religion only “as prescribed by a law and necessary in a democratic society” in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health, as well as to protect the rights and freedoms of other persons. 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, in public or private. These rights may be subject to limitations stated in the constitution. The constitution 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 as either corporations or associations. To apply through the Registrar of Associations, a group must submit its name, location, rules, and list of assets; the name, occupation, and addresses of officers and at least seven members; and the resolution appointing its officers. A minimum of seven members is required to register an association. To receive tax benefits, notably tax exemptions on the importation of goods, and corporate social responsibility assistance, religious groups must also register with the Finance Ministry. The government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Islamic groups, and the Baha’i local spiritual assembly through individual acts of incorporation.

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 permission to provide spiritual counsel in prisons.

The constitution prohibits compulsory religious education or participation in religious ceremonies in state schools but permits religious groups to provide religious instruction. Religious instruction is provided by the Catholic and Anglican Churches and offered during school hours. There are no faith-based schools.

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. The Catholic Church publishes a monthly magazine, titled *L'Echo des Iles*.

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

Government Practices

The Office of the Vice President held the portfolio for religious affairs. The government permitted live broadcasts of religious programming on important religious occasions such as Christmas, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) provided transmission time for radio broadcasts, lasting up to 90 minutes each, of Catholic masses and Anglican worship services on alternate Sundays. The SBC continued to review and approve all other religious programming to ensure hate speech was not broadcast, but there were no incidents reported. Other religious programming consisted of 15-minute prerecorded prayer broadcasts, permitted to Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, and Anglican groups every two weeks. Smaller religious groups continued to protest the government policy that did not grant them their own dedicated radio broadcast time. Private radio stations did not feature religious programs.

SIFCO, composed of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and other religious groups present in the country, commented publicly on national issues and actions taken by the National Assembly and the president, including the setting up of regional councils, as part of local governance reform and nomination of councilors by the two main political parties. SIFCO urged the government to consider the right of every citizen to participate in local or regional government in order to promote national unity and peace. President Danny Faure continued to meet with members of SIFCO regularly, and the Office of the Vice President consulted SIFCO on issues of national interest.

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.

In November various religious groups signed an agreement with the prison authorities to carry out spiritual and religious activities in prisons. At the signing ceremony, Superintendent of Prisons Raymond St. Ange said that religion and spirituality needed to be the bedrock of rehabilitation, providing a firm footing for all the efforts undertaken by the prison service.

In April the Anglican Church renovated and reopened a church at Anse Kerlan on the island of Praslin funded by the Anglican diocese with a contribution from the government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

SIFCO continued its presence at national official events. For example, SIFCO provided interfaith prayers or blessings at the National Day event celebrating the country's independence. SIFCO hosted an interfaith forum in February as part of its activities to mark World Interfaith Harmony Week. The forum included presentations by representatives of the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Baha'i faiths. Following the forum, SIFCO officials commented on the challenges to interfaith harmony and the progress made compared with the past. Some of the challenges hindering interfaith harmony, SIFCO said, were a culture of fear, seeing other faiths as a threat, and a lack of willingness to learn about other religions and beliefs.

In his remarks to Muslim worshippers during the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, Imam Idriss Yusuf of the Quran and Sunnah Society called for increased understanding and tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During visits to the country, U.S. embassy personnel from Mauritius met with leaders and members of civil society and government officials, including officials from the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs and members of parliament, to discuss the importance of freedom of religious expression at all levels.