

ANGOLA 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and guarantees freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting legally established criteria and allows the government to shutter the premises of unregistered groups. There are 81 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups. The government has not recognized any new religious groups since passage of a 2004 law that required religious groups to have at least 100,000 citizens as members. On May 14, a new law reduced the requirement to 60,000 but added several other requirements, including a mandate that 1,000 members reside in each of the country's 18 provinces. The government also transferred the adjudication authority to the Ministry of Culture from the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. According to media reports, between November 2018 and May 2019, the government closed 2,308 places of worship, including 46 mosques, during Operation Rescue, a nationwide law enforcement campaign to combat criminality, unlicensed associations, and unregistered churches of various denominations and mosques. Government officials acknowledged the closures but disputed the figures reported in the state-owned newspaper. They stated that regulation was necessary to prevent "religious fraud" and practices that violate human rights or cultural norms. Some of the places of worship, including two mosques, subsequently received authorization to reopen. The government provided no further data on places of worship that reopened. Leaders of unrecognized churches criticized the new religious freedom law and the closure of places of worship under the Operation Rescue law enforcement campaign.

Civil society activists celebrated the release in January of four Muslims whose 2017 conviction they said was politically motivated. Activists continued to call for an independent review of the case of Jose Kalupeteka, leader of the Light of the World religious group, who was convicted of murder in 2016 for leading the killings of nine officers during a police raid into the group's settlement in Mount Sumi, in Huambo Province.

Throughout the year, officials from the U.S. embassy and the Department of State raised religious freedom issues, including the closure of places of worship, long-pending registration applications, and implementation of the new religious freedom legislation, with government officials. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also met with representatives of religious groups and civil society

organizations in several provinces to discuss government actions related to religious freedom and the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31.4 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2014 national census, approximately 41 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 38 percent Protestant. Individuals not associated with any religious group constitute 12 percent of the population. The remaining 9 percent is composed of animists, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, and other religious groups. While the 2014 census reported there were an estimated 103,000 Muslims in the country, one leader of a Muslim organization stated there could be as many as 800,000, including an unknown number of Muslim migrants mainly from North and West African countries. There are approximately 350 Jews, who primarily are resident foreign nationals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination. The constitution requires the state to protect churches and religious groups as long as they comply with the law. The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship, and it recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities as long as they adhere to the law. The constitution permits conscientious objection for religious reasons, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies religious rights may not be suspended even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from, and correspond with, religious counselors. The law establishes that conscientious objectors may perform civilian service as an alternative to military service.

In May a new religious freedom law came into force. The new law, which updates a 2004 law, continues to require religious groups to register to receive government recognition and allows the government to close down unregistered groups. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property collectively and use their property to hold religious events, exempts them from paying certain property and import taxes, and authorizes a group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system. The new law requires 60,000 member signatures from

legal residents to apply for registration, a decrease from the previous requirement of 100,000 signatures, and adds a requirement that at least 1,000 signatures originate from members residing in each of the country's 18 provinces. Each signature and resident declaration must be notarized separately. The law requires religious groups to submit documents defining their organizational structure, location, methods and schedule of worship, financial resources, and planned construction projects. The law also establishes qualification requirements for clergy and requires religious doctrine to conform with the principles and rights outlined in the constitution.

The Ministry of Culture through its National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR) is the adjudication authority for the registration process and has an oversight role of religious activities. INAR, which is led by a religious minister, assists religious groups through the registration process and analyzes religious doctrine to ensure that it is consistent with the constitution. Prior to May, when the new law came into force, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, rather than INAR, adjudicated the registration process.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system. Private schools are allowed to teach religion.

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

Government Practices

On May 31, media reported that the government had closed 2,308 places of worship since November 2018 as part of the nationwide Operation Rescue law enforcement campaign to combat criminality. Government officials acknowledged the closures but disputed the figures reported in the state-owned newspaper. They stated that regulation was necessary to prevent "religious fraud" and practices that violate human rights or cultural norms. Some of the places of worship, including two mosques, received authorization to reopen. The government provided no further data on places of worship that reopened. The government stated that many of the churches were closed for hosting criminal activity and not complying with zoning laws meant to protect the health and safety of citizens. Separately, the Islamic Community of Angola (COIA) confirmed that 46 mosques had been closed, mainly in Lunda Norte Province.

Activity conducted under Operation Rescue included the closure of several unlicensed religious groups that failed to comply with an October 2018 mandate

that all unregistered religious groups submit initial registration documents within 30 days or cease operations. Ninety-four unregistered religious groups applied for recognition in 2018 in compliance with the October 2018 registration mandate.

Following the entry into force of the new religious freedom law in May, the government gave religious groups that had submitted their registration files six months (May to November) to finalize the registration process and gather 60,000 signatures. Unregistered religious groups complained that the period was too short and that the notary and residential declaration requirements, which they estimated to cost approximately \$7.50 per signature, were too costly and burdensome for their congregations. In addition to the signature requirement, the large number of undocumented residents and an unreliable residential registry system also presented obstacles to registration, according to the religious group leaders. While the law states the government may shut down religious groups that do not meet the requirements, government officials informed religious leaders they would delay enforcement until the presidency published additional implementing regulations.

Religious leaders continued to criticize the 2018 decree that led to the closure of more than 2,000 places of worship and the registration requirements under the new religion law. Several also complained that the government did not recognize theology training completed abroad.

The INAR director and Ministry of Culture officials continued to state concern about the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which were alleged to have exploited vulnerable populations with limited financial means by requiring them to provide recurring payments or dues to worship or belong to these organizations. In a May speech, former minister of culture Carolina Cerqueira explained that the government must closely monitor religious congregations to protect its citizens from “predatory religious groups.”

The government continued not to recognize any Muslim groups officially or issue any licenses to Muslim groups to practice their religion legally. Two Muslim organizations, CISA (Islamic Community of Angola) and COIA (also translated as the Islamic Community of Angola), submitted initial documentation requesting official recognition of their mosques following the October 2018 mandate and the new religious freedom law. In the past, government officials stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution. According to COIA, there were 69 unregistered mosques in the country.

The Baha'i Faith and the Church of World Messianity remained the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered prior to the 2004 law. Jewish and Ismaili Muslim religious minorities, mostly concentrated in the business sector, reported no issues concerning religious freedom and stated they had good relations with high-level government officials.

On January 28, the government released on probation four local Muslims convicted in 2017 for attempting to establish a terrorist cell after serving half of their three-year sentences. Journalists and human rights organizations welcomed the court decision to release the four young Muslims but continued to criticize the 2016 murder conviction of Jose Kalupeteka, leader of the Light of the World religious group. They argued that both cases were politically motivated and marred by religious bias. Some activist groups urged the government to reopen the Kalupeteka case in order to have an independent review, and others demanded his unconditional release.

During the year, Catholic radio station Ecclesia expanded its broadcast area to 14 provinces following a January 2018 presidential announcement that the government would allow the radio station to extend its signal beyond Luanda Province.

A bilateral framework agreement between the Holy See and the government was signed during Minister of External Relations Manuel Augusto's visit to the Vatican on September 12-14. The agreement recognized the Catholic Church's activities in the country, its real property, including schools and health centers, as well the expansion of Radio Ecclesia's signal to all the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Political leaders from the ruling and opposition parties – citing public opinion – called for increased government action against churches that committed financial fraud and religious groups that condoned practices that they said violated human rights or cultural norms. Some religious leaders acknowledged a perception that the majority-foreign Islamic community allegedly posed a cultural and security threat.

In September the Council of the Christian Churches in Angola and INAR inaugurated the Interreligious Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development as part of the Luanda Biennale, a Pan-African event organized in partnership with UNESCO and the African Union. At the event, religious leaders and civil society

members affirmed religious freedom and discussed religion's potential to be a stabilizing force at the event.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In March a senior official from the Department of State Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy, and Labor met with Minister of Justice and Human Rights Francisco Queiroz to discuss the impact of Operation Rescue and to raise issues with the implementation of the 2018 law. Noting that 60,000 signatures was still a high requirement and would not solve the problem of predatory or criminal practices, he advocated for government flexibility and transparency. In September visiting U.S. officials and embassy staff discussed the closures of places of worship and religion registration requirements with government officials and leaders of several religious groups, including the Congregation of Christian Churches in Angola, Angolan Christian Forum, the Order of Angolan Evangelical Pastors (OPEA), Jesuit Refugee Services, COIA, and Chabad, from the local Jewish community.

Embassy officials met with religious leaders and civil society representatives throughout the year to discuss religious freedom issues and opportunities for cooperation. Embassy officials met with representatives of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities and civil society and discussed their reaction to the government's stated concerns about the proliferation of churches. They also discussed the status of pending recognitions, the new law on religion, efforts to promote increased interfaith dialogue, and the impact of Operation Rescue on religious groups. Embassy officers discussed religious freedom issues in several provinces, including Luanda, Benguela, Huila, Cunene, and Lunda Norte, with representatives of multiple religious groups and organizations, including the Congregation of Christian Churches in Angola, Tocoists, OPEA, Jesuit Refugee Services, Caritas, MOSAIKO (a Catholic-based organization), Norwegian Church Aid, COIA, Chabad, and Radio Ecclesia.