

CABO VERDE 2021 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 law requires religious groups to prove they have 500 members before they may register formally as such and accords registered groups certain rights and privileges. Under a concordat with the Holy See, the government recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and Catholic marriages under civil law. All of the country's prisons suspended activities, including religious assistance such as visits from clergy, during the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although they gradually resumed some assistance at the end of the year. In October, the Ministry of Justice held a four-day National Meeting on Social Reintegration (of former inmates) with representatives of major religious groups. In November, President Jose Maria Neves met with Church of the Nazarene General Superintendent Eugenio Duarte, originally from Cabo Verde, to discuss the role of the Church in Cabo Verdean society. In July and August, the responsible government minister met with representatives of multiple Christian denominations to underscore the government's stated interest in contributing to the development of the social projects of those institutions.

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

In meetings with government officials, the Ambassador stressed the importance of religious tolerance. In December, the Ambassador underscored the significance of religious freedom during a gathering of senior officials and Cabo Verdeans of Jewish descent to commemorate the Cabo Verde Jewish Heritage Project. The embassy partnered with civil society groups, including those with close ties to religious organizations, to support programs of mutual interest, such as strengthening laws that prohibit discrimination on a number of bases, including religion.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 589,000 (midyear 2021). The preliminary 2020 national census showed a total population of 498,000. According to the 2010 national census, the most recent to report population by religious grouping, 77 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent

Protestant, 2 percent Muslim, and 11 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 (Church of Jesus Christ), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Independent Baptists, and other Pentecostal and evangelical Christian groups. There are small Baha'i 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 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 specific religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison. These may include discrimination against individuals for their expressed religion or lack thereof, violations of the freedom of and from religious education, denial of religious assistance in hospitals and prisons, denial of free speech to religious organizations, threats against places of worship, and violations of conscientious objection within the bounds of the law.

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 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 and the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and it 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. To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Failure to register can impinge on a religious group's ability to conduct such activities as importing supplies, purchasing land, and constructing places of worship. Registration provides additional benefits, including 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 law requires religious groups to obtain the notarized signatures of 500 members before they may begin any activities related to developing their presence in the country. Failure to present the required signatures prevents religious groups from completing their formal registration process and obtaining tax-exempt status and protections to property and presence in the country.

The law permits conscientious objection to mandatory military service on religious grounds.

According to the law, recognized churches and religious communities or organizations may apply for and obtain authorization to provide moral and religious education in public schools. Such education is optional, not required. By law, the government is to ensure necessary conditions to provide moral and religious education in schools without discrimination.

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

Government Practices

All of the country's prisons suspended activities, including religious assistance such as visits from clergy, during the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although some inmates communicated with religious communities through letters. Prisons gradually resumed some assistance at the end of the year with support from

representatives of several religious groups. The Ministry of Justice reported that it held a four-day National Meeting on Social Reintegration (of former inmates) in October with representatives of all major religious groups, partners in the implementation of the 2022 National Plan for Social Reintegration.

In November, newly inaugurated President Neves met with a visiting delegation from the Church of the Nazarene led by U.S.-based General Superintendent Duarte, originally from Cabo Verde, to discuss the role of the Church in Cabo Verdean society. In July and August, Minister of the Presidency and Parliamentary Affairs Filomena Goncalves, who was also responsible for relations with religious groups, met with Catholic, Nazarene, and Seventh-day Adventist representatives to underscore the government's stated interest in maintaining ties and contributing to development of the social projects of these institutions. In December, Prime Minister Correia e Silva visited social projects, including preschools, supported by the Nazarene Church. He announced that the government would meet with leaders from other religious groups in the coming months as part of the new government program "MAIS – Mobilization to Accelerate Social Inclusion" to combat poverty and provide assistance to vulnerable communities.

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

In meetings with government officials, the Ambassador stressed the importance of religious tolerance. In December, the Ambassador underscored the significance of religious freedom and tolerance during a gathering he hosted of senior officials and Cabo Verdeans of Jewish descent to celebrate the success of the Cabo Verde Jewish Heritage Project. The embassy partnered with civil society groups, including those with close ties to religious organizations, to support programs of mutual interest, such as strengthening laws which prohibit discrimination on a number of bases, including religion. An embassy series of videos on social media promoting English language reading featured children's books highlighting a variety of faiths and religious traditions.