

MOZAMBIQUE 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the right to practice freely or not to practice religion 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 political parties from using names or symbols associated with religious groups. Religious groups have the right to organize, worship, and operate schools. According to local organizations, as an Islamic State-affiliated terrorist group, ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) intensified attacks in Cabo Delgado Province, residents in the province who because of their appearance were identified as Muslim continued to face risk of sometimes arbitrary detention by police and armed forces. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), news media outlets, and human rights organizations continued to strongly criticize the government's response as exacerbating existing grievances among historically marginalized majority-Muslim populations. The government's COVID-19 preventive measures limited religious services for significant parts of the year, restricted the size of gatherings, and at times prohibited services. Government officials reported that numerous religious leaders contravened the restrictions, including seven evangelical Christian religious leaders who were detained in June for holding in-person services.

As in previous years, conflict in Cabo Delgado continued, with ISIS-M occupying entire communities and burning religious and government structures. Regional forces deployed to Cabo Delgado in August conducted joint operations with Mozambican forces that resecured significant towns and roads by the end of the year with a marked decrease in violence. Media reports indicated that ISIS-M targeted both Muslim and Christian communities. Muslim and Christian leaders condemned violence as a means of political change, and Muslim leaders emphasized that religious-based violence that invoked Islam was inconsistent with tenets of the faith.

The U.S. Ambassador discussed the continuing attacks in Cabo Delgado with President Filipe Nyusi, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of the Interior, and other high-level officials. Among other messages, he noted the continued need to engage partners from the religious community to effectively address the ongoing violence. The Ambassador and embassy officers discussed the importance of religious tolerance to promote peace and security with

leaders and representatives of religious groups and local civil society organizations. The U.S. government continued to implement and fund activities in Cabo Delgado to improve faith-based community resilience and work with religious leaders to counter extremist messaging related to religion. The Ambassador and a senior embassy official hosted virtual iftars with religious and community leaders in Maputo and Cabo Delgado as part of the embassy's outreach to the Muslim community.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 30.9 million (midyear 2021). According to 2020 data from the National Statistics Institute, 27 percent of citizens are Catholic, 19 percent Muslim, 17 percent evangelical or Pentecostal Christian, 16 percent Zionist Christian, 2 percent Anglican, and less than 5 percent Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i. The remaining 14 percent claim no religious affiliation. A significant portion of the population adheres to syncretic indigenous religious beliefs, a category not included in government census figures, characterized by a combination of African traditional practices and aspects of either Christianity or Islam. Because of the unreliability of census data, Muslim leaders continued to state that their community accounts for 25-30 percent of the total population, a statistic frequently reported in the press. The Muslim population is concentrated in the northern part of the country.

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 individual may be deprived of his or her 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. The constitution 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 NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs. Under the law, “religious organizations” are charities or humanitarian organizations, while “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 their local leaders, and presenting 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

During the year, violent attacks against government forces and civilian populations that began in 2017 continued in the northeastern districts of Cabo Delgado Province, primarily perpetrated by the terrorist group ISIS-M. In an attempt to control the situation and stem the tide of violence, police continued the practice of arbitrarily arresting some individuals because they appeared to be Muslim by their clothing or facial hair, according to national Islamic organizations and other media reports. Some government officials, observers, and administrators at camps for internally displaced persons noted that because the attacks occurred in a Muslim-majority area, many civilian victims were Muslim as well.

Some NGOs, news media outlets, and human rights organizations continued to strongly criticize the government's response, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, as exacerbating existing grievances of the historically marginalized Muslim-majority populations. During the year, the provincial and district affiliates of the Islamic Council in Cabo Delgado engaged with government counterparts and Catholic counterparts to improve understanding and limit the detention of Muslim individuals unconnected to the insurgency. This engagement included acting as a mediator between families and government or law enforcement officers.

ISIS-M publicly pledged allegiance to ISIS in June 2019 and claimed responsibility for more than 30 attacks since then. According to analysts, young men returning from studying Islamic teachings abroad following a more "austere" form of Islam than historically practiced in the country helped contribute to the radicalization of youth.

Reporting on the attacks in Cabo Delgado remained limited and was often characterized as unreliable due to a strong security force presence, electricity and cell network blackouts, and government restrictions on independent journalists' access to affected areas.

On September 7 and 12, the national police detained two groups belonging to an unidentified religious group in Tete Province. Police, who initially detained the individuals for violating COVID-19 prevention measures, said they were investigating whether the groups were linked to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado.

Muslim leaders also expressed concern regarding the growing humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado, with conflict and natural disasters displacing nearly 800,000 persons since 2017.

For significant periods of the year, the government suspended all religious services, among other public and private gatherings, pursuant to a state of public calamity (SOPC) order issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19, although restrictions relaxed intermittently to permit small gatherings. Officials from the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs reported working with religious leaders on adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures but said that many groups contravened measures throughout the year. Observers stated that SOPC religious enforcement was not targeted against a particular religion but was enforced across all religious groups. Local media reported that several religious leaders were arrested and fined for violating the SOPC, including seven

evangelical leaders who were detained on June 25 for holding in-person services in Nampula.

Parliament continued to consider a draft law on religious practices first proposed by the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs in 2019 to update a preindependence law. Religious leaders noted that they had an opportunity to discuss and provide input into the draft law.

On February 11, the Vatican announced the transfer to Brazil of Bishop Luis Fernando Lisboa, then the Bishop of Pemba in Cabo Delgado Province. Media reported that Lisboa was an outspoken advocate for the people of Cabo Delgado, including persons displaced by terrorist attacks. After his transfer, Lisboa stated that he received threats after criticizing the Mozambican government's response to the terrorist attacks. The new Bishop of Pemba, Antonio Juliase Ferreira Sandramo, also spoke publicly regarding the lack of security in Cabo Delgado.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although ISIS-M fighters said they targeted Christians and Christian villages, reporters and local aid workers stated that in practice they made little distinction among their victims. Media reports also indicated that ISIS-M targeted both Muslim and Christian communities. They occupied entire communities and burned religious and government structures, including during a multiday attack on the town of Palma in March. Regional forces deployed to Cabo Delgado in August 2021 conducted joint operations with government forces that resecured significant towns and roads by the end of the year with a marked decrease in violence, according to government officials. The number of persons displaced by the conflict numbered nearly 800,000 by the end of the year, an approximately tenfold increase over 2020.

Prominent Muslim leaders continued to condemn the attacks in the northern part of the country, stating that the strict version of Islam preached by those allegedly responsible was not in line with the country's traditional Islamic culture and practice. For example, Provincial Delegate of the Islamic Council in Nampula Sheikh Abdulmagid Antonio told local media in June that religion should promote lasting and effective peace and that "no religion incites violence and intolerance."

Civil society and religious organizations conducted outreach to promote religious tolerance during the year. An interfaith group of leaders continued efforts to provide food to needy families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an

interfaith network established in November 2020, a coalition of religious groups from the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, including the Islamic Council of Mozambique and the Catholic Church, continued coordinating assistance to support displaced civilian populations affected by the violence and to discuss resolution of the crisis.

During a May 7 interfaith gathering, religious leaders said that terrorism in Cabo Delgado was linked to politics of exclusion, poverty, injustice, and oppression, rather than religion.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador engaged President Nyusi, Minister of Defense Jaime Neto, Minister of Justice Helena Kida, Minister of Interior Amade Miquidade, counterparts in other diplomatic missions and multilateral organizations, and other senior officials on the escalating violence in the northern region. Among other messages, he noted the continued need to engage partners from the religious community to effectively address the violence. Embassy officers engaged parliamentarians and ministry officials to ensure the draft law on religious practices, pending since 2019, permitted religious groups with few members to register and continue practicing legally.

Through a series of outreach initiatives, the Ambassador and embassy officers discussed the importance of religious tolerance to promote peace and security with leaders and representatives of religious groups and local civil society organizations.

The embassy concluded its support of a faith-based project in Cabo Delgado led by the Islamic Council of Mozambique designed to strengthen community ties, foster resilience, and develop locally based strategies to combat violent extremism.

Throughout the year, the embassy partnered with religious leaders to provide youth vulnerable to violent extremism in coastal Nampula Province with messages from credible and influential religious voices to counter violent extremism. The embassy and its partners disseminated the videos and audio recordings through social media and local and provincial radio stations and hosted youth listener clubs.

The embassy again engaged in digital outreach on social media during Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, welcoming continued engagement to achieve shared goals and commending the resilience of Muslims in the country in finding creative ways to

celebrate during the pandemic. In addition, the Ambassador and a senior embassy official hosted virtual iftars with religious and community leaders in Maputo and Cabo Delgado during Ramadan to engage religious and young community leaders and discuss the impact of the Cabo Delgado crisis on the Muslim community.

The embassy discussed LGBTQI+ inclusion, among other topics, with the Christian Council of Mozambique, which represents 24 church denominations and promotes tolerance and inclusivity. In November, the embassy nominated council president Felicidade Chirinda for the International Women of Courage Award.