

TANZANIA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitutions of the union government and of the semiautonomous government in Zanzibar both prohibit religious discrimination and provide for freedom of religious choice. Since independence and by tradition, the country has been governed by alternating Christian and Muslim Presidents, who then appoint a Prime Minister from the other religious group. Following the unexpected death of President John Magufuli in March, Vice President Samia Hassan, who is Muslim, assumed the presidency and in a break with the tradition, opted to maintain Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa, also a Muslim. In June, 34 members of the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation (UAMSHO), an Islamist group advocating for Zanzibar's full autonomy, were released after being arrested in 2013 on terrorism charges. Some religious leaders said religious institutions continued to be discouraged from involvement in politics. According to civil society organizations, the government issued a new directive by the Registrar of Societies requiring all previously registered societies, including faith-based organizations, to reregister every five years, to intimidate leaders. Instead of the previous permanent registration status, all societies were required to be reevaluated every five years, and failure to reregister within the allotted time could result in deregistration. There were no reports of religious associations or faith-based organizations being deregistered under this directive, which was subsequently amended to remove reregistration provisions for churches, mosques, and other places of worship. In September, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Simon Sirro directed the police to review Quranic and Bible studies in madrassahs and church-affiliated schools and stated that the police force would begin inspecting houses of worship to verify if terrorism was being taught at schools. In response, Sheikh Issa Ponda, secretary of the Council of Imams and an outspoken government critic, held a meeting with other imams to discuss Sirro's statements, stating that the directive was contrary to freedom of religion and pledging to meet with bishops to coordinate joint measures to address potential interference in religious education.

On September 20, 10-15 suspected members of the Islamic State in Mozambique carried out an attack in the Mtwara region. Following one individual's killing of three police officers and a security guard in Dar es Salaam on August 25, a pro-Islamic State media group promoted the attack online as an example of an effective lone wolf attack. Police said the attacker had accessed Islamic extremist content on social media depicting terror acts by al-Shabab and ISIS. There was one report of an alleged witchcraft-related killing in the country.

The U.S. Ambassador met with prominent religious leaders to discuss COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among the population. The embassy brought together religious leaders of various faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 62.1 million (midyear 2021). A 2020 Pew Forum survey estimates approximately 63 percent of the population identifies as Christian, 34 percent as Muslim, and 5 percent practice other religions. According to the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Christians are approximately evenly divided between Roman Catholics and Protestant denominations. Other local observers believe that Roman Catholics constitute the majority of Christians, with Lutherans as the second largest denomination. Additional Christian groups include Anglicans, Pentecostal Christian groups, Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The majority of Muslims are Sunni, although significant minority communities exist, including Ismaili, Twelver Shia, Ahmadi, and Ibadi Muslims. On the mainland, large Muslim communities are concentrated in coastal areas, with some Muslim minorities located inland in urban areas. Other groups include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and those who did not express a religious preference. A separate 2010 Pew Forum report estimates more than half the population practices elements of African traditional religions.

Zanzibar's 1.3 million residents are 99 percent Muslim, according to a U.S. government estimate. According to a 2012 Pew Forum report, two-thirds are Sunni. The remainder consists of several Shia groups, mostly of Asian descent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitutions of the union government (United Republic of Tanzania) and of the semiautonomous government in Zanzibar both provide for equality regardless of religion, prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, and stipulate freedom of conscience or faith and choice in matters of religion, including the freedom to change one's faith. The union government constitution allows these rights to be limited by law for purposes such as protecting the rights of others; promoting the national interest; and safeguarding defense, safety, peace, morality, and health. The Zanzibar constitution allows rights to be limited by law if such a limitation is

“necessary and agreeable in the democratic system” and does not limit the “foundation” of a constitutional right or bring “more harm” to society.

Since independence and by tradition, the country has been governed by alternating Christian and Muslim Presidents who have, by tradition, appointed a Prime Minister from the other religious group with the endorsement of parliament.

The law prohibits religious groups from registering as political parties. To register as a political party, a group may not use religion as a basis for approving membership, nor may it follow a policy of promoting a religion.

The law prohibits a person from taking any action or making any statement with the intent of insulting the religious beliefs of another person. Anyone committing such an offense may be punished with a year’s imprisonment.

On the mainland, secular laws govern Christians and Muslims in both criminal and civil cases. In family-related cases involving inheritance, marriage, divorce, and the adoption of minors, the law also recognizes customary practices, which could include religious practices. In such cases, some Muslims choose to consult religious leaders in lieu of bringing a court case.

Zanzibar, while also subject to the union constitution, has its own President, court system, and legislature. Muslims in Zanzibar have the option of bringing cases to a civil or *qadi* (Islamic court or judge) court for matters of divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other issues covered by Islamic law. All cases tried in Zanzibar courts, except those involving Zanzibari constitutional matters and sharia, may be appealed to the Union Court of Appeals on the mainland. Decisions of Zanzibar’s *qadi* courts may be appealed to a special court consisting of the Zanzibar chief justice and five other sheikhs. The President of Zanzibar appoints the chief *qadi*, who oversees the *qadi* courts and is recognized as the senior Islamic scholar responsible for interpreting the Quran. There are no *qadi* courts on the mainland.

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Home Affairs on the mainland and with the Office of the Registrar General on Zanzibar. Registration is required by law on both the mainland and in Zanzibar. The fines for offenses under the Societies Act, including operating without registration, range from one million to 10 million shillings (\$430-\$4,300).

To register, a religious group must provide the names of at least 10 members, a written constitution, resumes of its leaders, and a letter of recommendation from

the district commissioner. Such groups may then list individual congregations, which do not need separate registration. Muslim groups registering on the mainland must provide a letter of approval from the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA). Muslim groups registering in Zanzibar must provide a letter of approval from the mufti, the government's official liaison to the Muslim community. Christian groups in Zanzibar may register directly with the registrar general.

On the mainland, BAKWATA elects the mufti. On Zanzibar, the President of Zanzibar appoints the Mufti, who serves as a leader of the Muslim community and as a public servant assisting with local governmental affairs. The Mufti of Zanzibar nominally approves all Islamic activities and supervises all mosques on Zanzibar. The Mufti also approves religious lectures by visiting Islamic clergy and supervises the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar.

Public schools may teach religion, but it is not a part of the official national curriculum. School administrations or parent-teacher associations must approve such classes, which are taught on an occasional basis by parents or volunteers. Public school registration forms must specify a child's religious affiliation so that administrators can assign students to the appropriate religion class if one is offered. Students may also choose to opt out of religious studies. Private schools may teach religion, although it is not required, and these schools generally follow the national educational curriculum unless they receive a waiver from the Ministry of Education for a separate curriculum. In public schools, students are allowed to wear the hijab but not the niqab.

The government does not designate religious affiliation on passports or records of vital statistics. Police reports must state religious affiliation if an individual will be required to provide sworn testimony. Applications for medical care must specify religious affiliation so that any specific religious customs may be observed. The law requires the government to record the religious affiliation of every prisoner and to provide facilities for worship for prisoners.

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

Government Practices

Following the unexpected death of President John Magufuli in March, Vice President Samia Hassan assumed the presidency. In a break with the country's long-standing tradition of presidents appointing Prime Ministers of the other

religious group, Hassan, who is a Muslim, opted to maintain the then-sitting Prime Minister, Kassim Majaliwa, also a Muslim.

On June 16, the Director of Public Prosecution dropped charges against 34 of the 40 members of the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation (UAMSHO), an Islamist group advocating for Zanzibar's full autonomy, who had been in custody on the mainland following their arrests in 2013 on terrorism charges. On June 9, the Office of the Mufti of Zanzibar had urged Zanzibar President Hussein Mwinyi to speed up the case against UAMSHO members, citing their almost eight-year detention. At year's end, six clerics who were included among the 34 UAMSHO members remained in prison due to additional nonterrorism-related charges.

On August 10, the Office of the Registrar of Societies issued a new directive changing the status of all religious institutions and community faith-based organizations registered under the Ministry of Home Affairs to time-based registration from permanent registration. The government subsequently agreed to exclude churches, mosques, and other places of worship from the directive, but not faith-based organizations such as church-affiliated groups. By year's end, there had been no reports of religious associations or faith-based organizations being deregistered under this directive. The directive also stated that time-based registration would be valid for five years, requiring all societies and organizations to reregister with the registrar every five years with supporting documentation. All previously registered societies, including faith-based organizations, were required to undergo a new registration to receive a five-year registration certificate. All associations and organizations were granted a grace period of 90 days to implement and adopt the changes as required by the registrar, who said failure to reregister would result in deregistration. On August 16, Societies Registrar Emmanuel Kihampa stated that reregistration would enable the government to evaluate active societies and their compliance with registration conditions and legal requirements according to the law. According to religious and civil society organizations, the reregistration process would affect long-term planning and projects, as well as intimidate organizations deemed to be too critical of the government or ruling party. Independent Tanzanian political analyst Buberwa Kaiza said the change violated human rights, especially for religious organizations, by leaving the existence of faith-based entities to be determined by a single registrar. Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) secretary-general Charles Kitima, representing the Catholic Church, stated that while the government was obligated to provide guidelines on registering organizations, it should have been a

participatory process with stakeholders and religious leaders to discuss the directive's potential impact.

On July 25, police in Mbeya Region instructed Catholic Church staff and security guards at Mwanjelwa Parish to deny access to the church building to women dressed in Chadema opposition party colors. Police stated that the Church did not allow political-themed apparel. This followed the July 21 arrest of Chadema chairman Freeman Mbowe on terrorism charges. After the incident was recorded and posted online, TEC Secretary-General Kitima clarified that the Church does not have a dress code for worshippers, just for Church leaders. On August 15, 22 Chadema members were arrested outside of Bugando Catholic Church in Mwanza Region, where members went to pray for the release of Mbowe. Acting Regional Police Commander Gideon Msuya confirmed the arrests, stating that Chadema members were disturbing prayer services, which government officials were attending.

On September 11, following a bilateral meeting between the Tanzanian Police Force and Rwanda National Police in Kigali focused on enhancing cooperation against cross-border terrorism, IGP Sirro directed the police to review Quranic and Bible studies in madrassahs and church-affiliated schools. He stated that the police force would begin inspecting houses of worship to verify whether religious training was “building or demolishing” children, questioning if the training “provided for terrorism, or if it is training for the destruction of the country.” On September 12, Sheikh Issa Ponda, secretary of the Council of Imams and an outspoken government critic, held a meeting with other imams to discuss Sirro's statements, stating that the directive was contrary to freedom of religion and pledging to meet with bishops to coordinate joint measures to address potential interference in religious education.

On October 2, during the inauguration of a local mosque in Rufiji District in Pwani Region, Prime Minister Majaliwa commended the Istiqama community – an Ibadi Islam organization – for its efforts to strengthen unity between Muslims and persons of other faiths. In his remarks, he urged religious leaders to refrain from using houses of worship as political platforms and instead continue working closely with the government to build a respectful and peaceful country. Prime Minister Majaliwa said the government would continue working with all religious institutions to ensure social and spiritual projects were well implemented. He said that faith leaders should comply with government guidelines to build a “God-fearing” nation with a strong spiritual and moral foundation. Sheikh Badar bin Sood, chairman of the Istiqama community Board of Trustees, commended

President Hassan's government, which he said promoted solidarity and unity among all citizens.

According to some religious leaders, the government penalized prominent religious leaders for expressing views it deemed political and inflammatory. On August 17, the government ordered the arrest of Bishop Josephat Gwajima, Member of Parliament and Pentecostal pastor, for misrepresentation of government efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. While addressing worshippers at his church in Dar es Salaam, Gwajima opposed the government's acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines and urged all persons to refuse them.

Other prominent religious leaders voiced support for government COVID-19 prevention efforts and social distancing measures in their establishments. On September 2, religious leaders, high-profile soccer players, and government officials organized a soccer match in Dar es Salaam encouraging fans to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Chief Mufti of Tanzania Sheikh Abubakar Zubeir encouraged all citizens to accept the vaccine and continue taking precautions recommended by the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly, and Children. The government and religious groups cooperated to establish and adhere to COVID-19 guidelines.

On September 28, President Hassan called on religious leaders to help create public awareness on the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations as the government intensified measures against the pandemic. The President issued the call during an event marking the 50th anniversary of the Anglican Church in Dodoma Region, stating that religious leaders had a crucial role to play in sensitizing their communities to the effectiveness of vaccines. Some religious leaders expressed their readiness and commitment to honor the president's request. Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and Chairman of the Christian Council of Tanzania Fredrick Shoo stated he would continue to educate his followers through preaching. According to observers, religious leaders of various faiths were at the forefront of the awareness campaign to encourage their followers to be vaccinated as a way of reducing the number of COVID-19-related deaths.

On June 25, President Hassan met with TEC religious leaders to acknowledge the Catholic Church's contributions to development efforts in the areas of health, education, and water and sanitation. Hassan applauded the Church for providing services without discrimination based on religious affiliation, and for converting some Catholic universities into technical colleges to advance vocational education opportunities. She also encouraged cooperation between the Church and the

private sector, suggesting that they could work together to decrease unemployment and reduce poverty in the country. TEC president Archbishop Gervas Nyaisonga told President Hassan that taxes imposed on religious institutions providing social services adversely impacted the provision of services to the public. The President said that all religious institutions should increase transparency and trust in order that the Tanzanian Revenue Authority could fairly conclude whether services provided by faith-based organizations were for or not for profit. On September 28, the President announced that authorities were reevaluating activities by religious institutions, including faith-based organizations, to better determine reasonable tax obligations and award tax exemptions on not-for-profit activities.

On June 20, President Hassan awarded a certificate of recognition to Catholic Archbishop emeritus of Dar es Salaam Cardinal Polycarp Pengo for fostering peace, unity, and relationships among different faiths. The President expressed gratitude and pledged that the government would continue supporting the Catholic Church's peace and tolerance initiatives. The President also donated to Cardinal Pengo's initiative to build a church in the Diocese of Morogoro. According to media reports, this was a gesture to illustrate religious tolerance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On September 20, 10-15 suspected members of the Islamic State in Mozambique (ISIS-M) crossed into the country from Mozambique and attacked Mahurunga village in Mtwara Region. Sources reported that attackers killed at least two villagers, looted homes and shops, and abducted several villagers and forced them to carry stolen goods across the border to Mozambique. Witnesses said the attackers were "al-Shabab from Mozambique." (Local residents and fighters frequently refer to ISIS-M as "al-Shabab," although the group has no known connection with the Somalia-based terrorist group.) On September 23, local media reported that ISIS-M brought the victims across the border to Quissengue, Palma District in Cabo Delgado Province, where they decapitated at least four men and released the women. Sources reported that the attackers asked the hostages if they could recite the Quran, and if they were unable to, they were killed. According to counterterrorism experts, the attack in Mahurunga was the first ISIS-M incursion inside the country during the year and the first since Tanzanian troops landed in Mozambique as part of the Southern African Development Community's mission to Mozambique. Analysts stated that the attack closely resembled the attacks in Mtwara in 2020, during which ISIS-M looted and burned homes, killed villagers, and kidnapped others.

On August 25, police shot and killed Hamza Mohammed after Mohammed killed three police officers and a security guard in the diplomatic quarter of Dar es Salaam. According to Director of Criminal Investigations Camilius Wambura, Mohammed had accessed extremist content from social media pages depicting terror acts by al-Shabab and ISIS. Wambura stated that during the investigation, police discovered that Mohammed was “a type of terrorist who is ready to die for his religion,” although he did not specify which religion. In several other comments, IGP Sirro speculated the attack was linked to ISIS-M. Head of Police Operations Liberatus Sabas, however, told reporters the incident was not terror related.

Although the government outlawed witchcraft in 2015, a press release from Under the Same Sun – a Christian organization advocating for the rights of persons with albinism – stated it was likely that witchcraft-related killings continued throughout the country. On May 3, a five- or six-year-old boy with albinism was found dead, his body mutilated, in Uyui District of Tabora Region. Witnesses stated the body was found with severed arms and organs harvested and said they were likely sold to witch doctors. No persons were arrested in relation to the incident and the boy was not identified.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador met with religious leaders regarding vaccine hesitancy in Tanzania. The meeting included a discussion about the potential effects of vaccination and public awareness issues.