

MOZAMBIQUE 2022 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.

The government's COVID-19 preventive measures limiting religious services ended in April. 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.

An Islamic State-affiliated terrorist group, ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M), continued to attack rural communities, kill civilians, and burn religious and government structures in Cabo Delgado Province in addition to conducting scattered attacks in neighboring Nampula Province. Media reports indicated that ISIS-M targeted both Muslim and Christian communities. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), news media outlets, and human rights organizations warned that attributing religious motives alone to terrorists risked exacerbating existing socioeconomic grievances among historically marginalized majority-Muslim populations. Strong interfaith cooperation and collaboration continued throughout the country.

The U.S. Ambassador engaged senior officials on the violence in the northern region. Among other messages, he noted the continued need for the government to engage partners from the religious community to effectively address the violence. The Ambassador and embassy officers discussed the importance of religious tolerance to promote peace and security with government leaders and representatives of religious groups and local civil society organizations. The U.S. government continued to support activities in Cabo Delgado to improve faith-based community resilience and to work with religious leaders to counter extremist messaging related to religion. The embassy hosted an iftar with

religious and community leaders in Nampula province in the north of the country as part of the embassy's outreach to the Muslim community.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31.7 million (midyear 2022). According to 2020 data from the National Statistics Institute, 62 percent of citizens are Christian, 19 percent Muslim, and less than 5 percent are Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i. The largest Christian groups are evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, with 33 percent of the population, Catholics with 27 percent, and Anglicans with 2 percent. 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.

Stating that the census data was unreliable, Muslim leaders maintained that their community accounts for 25-30 percent of the total population, a statistic frequently reported in the press. The northern province of Cabo Delgado is the only province with a Muslim majority, but significant Muslim minority communities live throughout 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.

In May, parliament passed an anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism law that requires NGOs, including churches, to publish annual financial accounts of their income and expenditures and to keep eight years of financial records.

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 Cabo Delgado Province. From October 2017 to December 2022, the attacks displaced more than one million residents and killed nearly 2,000 civilians of all faiths. ISIS-M also attacked villages in two northern districts of Nampula Province. The latest ISIS-M attack in eastern Niassa Province occurred on January 6. ISIS-M publicly pledged allegiance to ISIS in June 2019.

The government discussed with interfaith leaders their role in fighting terrorism, including meetings between President Nyusi and the leaders of prominent religious organizations. The provincial and district affiliates of the Islamic Council in Cabo Delgado engaged with government officials to limit the detention of Muslim individuals unconnected to the insurgency, including acting as a mediator between families and government or law enforcement officers. The Islamic Council and Catholic Church, among other religious organizations, regularly interacted in the three northern provinces to promote interfaith harmony.

Restrictions on religious services related to COVID-19 mitigation efforts ended in April. The government worked with religious organizations, including the Islamic Council of Mozambique, to promote vaccination against COVID-19 among the Muslim community in the country. The government also conducted public health outreach with practitioners of traditional medicine, syncretic churches, and evangelical congregations. The Christian Council of Mozambique and the Islamic Council co-managed the peace clubs established in areas that were undergoing the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former Renamo combatants from the civil war that ended in 1992. The disarmament and demobilization aspects of the DDR process were expected to successfully conclude early in 2023.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In September, ISIS-M attacked a Catholic mission in Nampula's Memba District, killing an elderly missionary, burning down structures, and causing other religious workers and students to flee.

ISIS-M propaganda said the group targeted Christians and Christian villages, although in practice it made little distinction among its victims. Media reported

Muslim communities were also among the targets of often indiscriminate ISIS-M attacks in rural areas. Attacks often included setting fire to entire villages, including religious and government structures, and killing residents, including by beheading.

Religious leaders continued to express concern about the growing humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado, with some emphasizing the role of congregations in humanitarian response.

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. Sheikh Nasrullahi Dula of the Islamic Congress in Pemba told the Washington Post in October that "ultraconservative" clerics from Kenya and Tanzania brought radical ideology – "the opposite of what we preached" – to Cabo Delgado, starting in 2010.

NGOs, news media outlets, and human rights organizations warned that attributing religious motives alone to terrorists risked exacerbating existing socioeconomic grievances among historically marginalized majority-Muslim populations.

Civil society and religious organizations conducted outreach to promote religious tolerance during the year. An interfaith network, including the Islamic Council of Mozambique and the Catholic Church, coordinated some assistance to IDPs in Nampula and Cabo Delgado who were affected by terrorism in Cabo Delgado. The Islamic Council raised funds to support IDPs. Interfaith leaders also continued efforts to provide food to needy families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador engaged senior officials on the violence in the northern region. Among other messages, he noted the continued need for the government 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 to register and continue practicing legally, regardless of the size

of their membership. During her visit in July, the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights held a roundtable with the Islamic Council of Mozambique to discuss interfaith cooperation, religious freedom, and the role of religious leaders to facilitate reconciliation and stability in the northern part of the country.

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. As part of the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, the embassy gave a \$291,000 grant to the Islamic Council of Mozambique in a program co-managed with the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) to bolster and sustain peace clubs established under the DDR process.

During the year, the embassy implemented two programs aimed at helping religious and civil society leaders to develop and amplify credible messages that counter the narratives of extremist propaganda and improve community engagement. In collaboration with local Muslim leaders, one program produced messaging that countered false claims by extremists used to recruit youths into ISIS-M and delivered content via flyers, social media, and local radio. Another program provided local religious leaders with a forum for interfaith collaboration to address violence in their communities.

The embassy again engaged in outreach on social media during Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. The embassy sponsored an in-person iftar in Nampula during Ramadan to engage religious and young community leaders and discuss the impact of the Cabo Delgado crisis on the Muslim community; the Ambassador joined the iftar virtually, while other embassy representatives were present at the venue in Nampula. It was the embassy's first in-person iftar since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its Women's Empowerment series of roundtable discussions, the embassy invited CCM President Felicidade Chirinda to speak to a group of young activists about change-making in the country. The CCM represents 24 church denominations and promotes tolerance and inclusivity. Chirinda was the embassy's 2022 International Woman of Courage nominee for her efforts to

resolve conflict, promote lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex inclusion and advocate for vulnerable Mozambicans.