

# ZAMBIA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation but also provides for religious freedom and upholds the country's multireligious composition. It prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience and belief.

During the year, the Office of the Vice President continued its statutory mandate of ensuring Christian values were reflected in government, education, family, media, arts and entertainment, and business, as well as promoting church-state, interdenominational, and interfaith dialogue. On October 18, the country held the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, Repentance, and Reconciliation under the theme, "Promoting national unity, peace, and integration for our prosperous Zambia through hard work."

Attacks and killings of individuals suspected of practicing witchcraft continued. Victims were mostly elderly persons, including a 74-year-old man whom a local mob killed on suspicion that he was a witch. During Religious Freedom Day commemorations, some religious scholars said religious freedom entails equality of religious organizations, whether large or small. Some religious leaders continued to hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding of, and joint advocacy on, religious and other social issues.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met with government and religious figures to discuss topics related to religious freedom, interreligious dialogue, human rights, and governance.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 19.6 million (mid-year 2022). According to Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats) estimates, 95.5 percent of the country's population is Christian. Of these, 75.3 percent identify as Protestant and 20.2 percent as Roman Catholic. Protestant groups with the largest numbers of adherents include the Anglican Church, evangelical Christians, and Pentecostal groups. According to ZamStats, approximately 2.7 percent of the population is

Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs. Even smaller numbers adhere to other belief systems, including Indigenous religions and witchcraft, or hold no religious beliefs. Many persons combine Christianity and Indigenous beliefs.

The Muslim community is predominantly Sunni, with small groups of Ismaili and Shia Muslims. According to the Lusaka Muslim Society, there are approximately 100,000 Muslims in the country, including Congolese and Somali refugees. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims are primarily concentrated in Lusaka, Eastern, and Copperbelt Provinces. Many are immigrants or the children of immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired citizenship. Hindus, mostly of South Asian descent, are located largely in the Eastern, Copperbelt, and Lusaka Provinces and estimate the size of their community at 10,000 as of 2019. There are small numbers of Jews, mostly in Lusaka and Northern Province.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation but upholds freedom of conscience, belief, and religion for all persons. It prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the right of individuals to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. It also protects the freedom of individuals to change their religion or belief and states that no one shall be compelled to take an oath or perform acts contrary to his or her religious beliefs. The law prescribes legal recourse against, and penalties of fines and imprisonment for, violations of religious freedom.

Under the law, naming or accusing a person of being a witch or wizard is a criminal offense punishable either by fine or imprisonment of up to one year, while those who profess knowledge of witchcraft may face up to two years' imprisonment. The law has an exception for those who report to police any person alleged to be professing knowledge of, or practicing, witchcraft.

All religious groups are required to affiliate with an umbrella body, often referred to as a "mother body," which gathers individual churches and denominations under one administrative authority. There are 14 mother bodies: seven Christian

and seven non-Christian. These are the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), Independent Churches of Zambia, Apostles Council of Churches, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Christian Missions in Many Lands, Islamic Supreme Council of Zambia (ISCZ), Hindu Association of Zambia, Guru Nanak Council of Zambia, Jewish Board of Deputies Zambia, Rastafarians, Council for Zambia Jewry, and Baha'i Faith in Zambia. The largest mother bodies are the ZCCB, EFZ, and CCZ.

The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security retains the discretion to register any religious entity. To register, a group must have a unique name, a recommendation letter from its mother body, and a document listing the clergy's professional qualifications from a "recognized and reputable" theological school, but the government provides no specific definition or list of qualifying institutions. The Office of the Chief Registrar of Societies then conducts a preliminary assessment of the applicant's authenticity and religious purpose as well as a security check. Religious groups must pay a one-time fee of 3,000 kwacha (\$170) to establish registration and 100 kwacha (\$6) every first quarter of the year to retain it. They are also required to adhere to laws pertaining to employment practices and criminal conduct.

The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security has the legal authority to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure to pay registration fees or a finding by the Minister that the group has professed purposes or has taken or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of "peace, welfare, or good order." Groups may appeal this finding in the courts. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members.

The law provides for privileged tax treatment for public benefit organizations, including religious groups, provided they are established for the promotion of religion, education, and relief of poverty or other distress.

The constitution allows religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction to members of their religious communities. The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine. Students may request education in their religion and may opt out of religious instruction only if the school is not able to accommodate

their request. Religious education after grade nine is optional and is not offered at all schools. The religious curriculum focuses on Christian teachings but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

The Department of Immigration under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security has a mandate to approve or deny permits and visas for travelers coming into the country for religious activities. For any foreign clergy entering the country, religious groups must provide their proof of legal registration as a religious group in the country, a recommendation letter from their aligned mother body, and clearance from clergy in the country of origin. This documentation is presented to the Department of Immigration.

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

### **Government Practices**

In April, police in Lusaka arrested Andsen Zulu, a driver at Evelyn Horn College in Lusaka, and charged him with defamation of the President for allegedly calling him “a member of the anti-Christ.” A court convicted and sentenced Zulu to one year’s imprisonment on his own admission of guilt. In December, the government repealed the law criminalizing defamation of the President, which did not have a retroactive effect and Zulu remained in prison. On May 19, police arrested and charged Evangelist Benson Tembo for allegedly giving a sermon at a health clinic in which he called the President a “satanist.”

The government continued its policy of strengthening the country’s identity as a Christian nation, developing self-regulatory frameworks for church and religious umbrella groups, promoting interdenominational dialogue, preserving religious heritage sites, and coordinating public religious celebrations, such as the commemoration of the declaration as a Christian nation (December 29), the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, and Repentance (October 18), and World Prayer Day (first Friday in March), through the Office of the Vice President. During the year, the office also retained the mandate of ensuring Christian values were reflected in government, education, family, media, arts and entertainment, and business, as well as promoting church-state, interdenominational, and interfaith dialogue.

Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic mother bodies, along with leaders of other religious groups that opposed the existence of the then-Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, particularly for its perceived mandate to “actualize” the constitutional declaration of the country as a Christian nation, said President Hichilema’s abolition of the ministry in September 2021 was a significant step in protecting the right to religious freedom in the country. Dr. Tarcisius Mukuka, former lecturer of biblical studies at St Mary’s University Twickenham in London, who is founder and chief executive officer of the Society for Spiritual Intelligence, Leadership, and Democracy, stated that abolishing the ministry was one of the most positive developments as far as religious freedom is concerned. At the same time, however, President Hichilema placed the National Guidance and Religious Affairs portfolio under the Office of the Vice President. According to Mukuka, by placing these functions under the Office of the Vice President, the President enabled the government to continue setting and controlling the religious agenda in the country.

Several religious figures criticized the government’s policy of upholding the country’s declaration as a Christian nation, saying that it infringed the individual’s right to religious freedom and was discriminatory. In October, a senior Catholic prelate stated that although the declaration was aimed at reaffirming the country’s Christian identity, it disappointed the country’s Catholic bishops because it could lead to discrimination against other religious groups. He cited the example of the Hindu community, which has been in the country since the 1930s, saying that although its members were not Christian, they were nevertheless “bona fide Zambian citizens” due to their lengthy residence in the country. He argued that the declaration was contrary to the identity of the multifaith and multiethnic country, as it was inherently discriminatory toward other religious groups and was unnecessary. Others, including Muslim leaders, said that to maintain religious pluralism and tolerance, the country should remove the declaration from the constitution and replace it with a more inclusive statement of religious freedom. In the wake of reports that showed a substantial increase in reported cases of gender-based violence during the year compared to 2021, Bishop Billy Mfula, chairperson of the National Committee of the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation, noted that the declaration “set a standard for morality for the country and brings light on the nation to expose evil.”

On September 29, the ZCCB reaffirmed its support for laws that criminalize same-sex relations. ZCCB Secretary General Father Francis Mukosa issued a pastoral letter restating the bishops' position on homosexuality. "Practicing homosexuality constitutes a criminal offence in Zambia and the law [must] be respected," the ZCCB statement read in part. The statement followed a spate of sodomy cases and social media controversy that ensued after Lusaka Catholic Archbishop Alick Banda issued a letter accusing President Hichilema and law enforcement agencies of failing to enforce laws criminalizing same-sex relations. There is "complacency from the state and the law enforcement agencies," he wrote, because in the past year there was "an increase in the number of incidents and events that promote LGBT+ tendencies." Banda's language, however, was more inflammatory than many other religious leaders were comfortable with. A senior Catholic prelate explained that while he acknowledged that the law criminalizes same-sex relations, the political overtones in the letter, in which Archbishop Banda took a strong stance against the Hichilema administration on homosexuality, did not reflect the policy of the Vatican. Authorities regularly justified and encouraged the detention, arrests, and harassment of individuals perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+), citing the constitution's declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, often regardless of whether a crime even occurred.

The government did not register any new mother bodies during the year. A moratorium imposed in 2019 on the registration of new churches and religious groups remained in force pending adoption of a new policy on minimum standards for churches and religious groups that would be included in the government's framework for registering churches.

On October 18, the country held the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, Repentance, and Reconciliation under the theme, "Promoting national unity, peace, and integration for our prosperous Zambia through hard work." The Chair of the National Day organizing committee and Executive Director of the Independent Churches of Zambia, Prophetess Esther Jani, explained that the objective of this year's event was to place national unity, integration, and hard work at the center of national development and to encourage church and political leaders and the country "to seek God in humility and love for one another." President Hakainde Hichilema did not attend, but he delegated Vice President Mutale Nalumango to officiate at the national event in Lusaka. Other senior government officials and

religious leaders attended prayer services across the country. During the event, the Vice President encouraged Zambians to “seek unity, peace, and integration” to achieve prosperity through handwork.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Incidents of violence against, and killings of, suspected practitioners of witchcraft continued, particularly against elderly persons. For example, state media reported on June 11 that a mob in Mansa stoned to death a 74-year-old man identified as David Chilambe for causing the death of a 35-year-old man, allegedly through witchcraft. Media sources reported that on September 22, unknown persons killed a 52-year-old man of Kambanja village in Mwinilunga District on suspicion of practicing witchcraft.

Some leaders of the Muslim community said there was tension within the community. They said, for example, that immigrant Muslims from South Asia and the Middle East do not recognize the Islamic Supreme Council of Zambia as their mother body because it is led by Muslims who were born in the country.

During Religious Freedom Day commemorations, some religious scholars said religious freedom entails equality of religious organizations, whether large or small. For example, Sheikh Shaban Phiri, Secretary-General of the Islamic Supreme Council of Zambia, and Tarcisius Mukuka, Executive Director of the Society for Spiritual Intelligence, Leadership, and Democracy (a Catholic organization) emphasized the right for communities and individuals “to practice the religion of their choice without being stereotyped, discriminated, or suppressed,” which they both said were lacking in the country. Some religious leaders continued to hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding of, and joint advocacy on, religious and other social issues.

On September 3, the Catholic Church opened a new cathedral as part of the Catholic Diocese of Monze, in Southern Province. According to the late Bishop Moses Hamungole, who reportedly envisioned the cathedral, its construction was in response to the demands of the growing Catholic community in Southern Province and as a counterbalance to “the rapid growth and spread of Protestant churches” in the area.

## **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

During the year, the Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officials met with government officials, including the Minister of Justice, Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security, and with religious leaders to discuss a wide range of issues, including government regulation of religious groups, national religious events, potential areas of collaboration with the embassy on social services programming, and the harmful effects of religious justification in spurring the persecution of marginalized groups. In April, embassy officials engaged ISCZ leadership and other Muslim community leaders during Eid celebrations. Among other issues, they discussed relationships within the Muslim community.

Throughout the year, the Ambassador met with leaders that included the Apostolic Nuncio to Zambia and Malawi in Lusaka, the Anglican Bishop of Central Zambia in Copperbelt Province, Muslim community leaders in Ndola, and the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops. These discussions covered a wide range of issues, including religious freedom, the human rights of minority groups, governance, and the delivery of social services.