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2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Zimbabwe

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, in public or in private and alone or with others. The criminal code prohibits statements that are "insulting" or "grossly provocative" and that cause offense to persons of a particular race, tribe, place of origin, color, creed, or religion, or intend to cause such offense. In September, the government enacted the Marriages Act that prohibits child marriage under the age of 18. The act also explicitly recognizes the roles of faith leaders practicing Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and "any religion" to solemnize marriages according to the rites of their faiths.

There were reports police interfered in public religious events seen as political in nature. In June, police entered a prayer meeting held outside the offices of Zimbabwe Divine Destiny Christian network and arrested 34 bishops, pastors, and worshippers for disorderly conduct. According to witnesses, they were targeted for the perception that the meeting was political and antigovernment; police reportedly beat some of the congregants before the arrests. In July, police arrested an Apostolic bishop and opposition Zimbabwe Transformative Party leader along with 34 church members during a march. The 34 followers were held for four months until their trial in November when they were released with \$18 fines (fines are expressed in U.S. dollars but payable in the equivalent Zimbabwean dollars at the prevailing interbank rate) for criminal nuisance for singing gospel songs perceived as critical of the government and blocking pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The bishop and party leader remained in jail for convening a gathering and leading a procession

without notifying police. Religious and civil society groups reported increased government monitoring of public events, prayer rallies, church congregations, and activities of religiously affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) perceived to be critical of the government. The ruling party urged religious groups to support it, and some religious leaders expressed such support while others refrained from direct involvement. NGOs continued to report that security services targeted some religious leaders who engaged in political discourse perceived as negative toward the government.

Civil society reported Parliament held public hearings on the Private Voluntary Organization Amendment bill (PVO bill), introduced in 2021, with the goal to address global concerns about money laundering and terrorism financing. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) issued a statement urging Parliament to rethink the bill and expressing concern that if passed in its current form, it could limit or eliminate humanitarian assistance to citizens. The press and religious groups reported that the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party intensified outreach to religious groups. The government engaged religious leaders to address vaccine misinformation and promote vaccinations for COVID-19, measles, and polio.

Some Christian groups, such as the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust, Johane the Fifth of Africa International Apostolic Church, and the Union for Development of Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), continued to engage in ecumenical dialogue with other Apostolic religious groups to end child marriages, promote education, and overcome immunization prohibitions. The Zimbabwe Interreligious Council (ZIRC) interfaith platform, which convenes Christians and Muslims “to promote peace, reconciliation, good governance and holistic human development through interfaith action and collaboration,” established a secretariat.

In meetings with the government, U.S. officials raised concerns about likely impacts of the draft PVO Amendment bill on faith-based and other nongovernmental organizations and their ability to provide essential services. To underscore the importance of religious tolerance, the Chargé d’Affaires met in October with the leaders of the ZHOCD and its four member networks, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the UDACIZA, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). U.S. Embassy officials met with ZHOCD leaders, the chair of the ZIRC, the president, secretary general, and youth leaders of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe, the Johane the Fifth of Africa International Apostolic Church, Jewish leaders, and faith-based organizations to discuss religious freedom, religious tolerance, and the role of faith communities in supporting political reconciliation and national healing. In various meetings and settings, embassy officials urged

religious leaders to support vaccinations and expressed appreciation for their continued efforts to promote peace, human rights, and social cohesion.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 15 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2015 nationwide Demographic and Health Survey by the government statistics agency, the most recent such survey, 86 percent of the population is Christian – 37 percent Apostolic, 21 percent Pentecostal, 16 percent other Protestant, 7 percent Roman Catholic, and 5 percent other Christian. According to the survey, 11 percent of the population reports no religious affiliation, less than 2 percent adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs, and less than 1 percent is Muslim. Muslim leaders describe the community as larger than 1 percent and growing, and government officials agree it is growing, but data to support that view were not available.

While there are no reliable statistics regarding the percentage of the Christian population that combines traditional practices with Christianity, religious leaders report a continued increase in this fusion.

Most of the Muslim population lives in rural areas and some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers living in other suburban neighborhoods. There are also small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and humanists. Greek Orthodox and Jewish communities describe their membership as aging and diminishing in numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious belief and provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion in public or in private and alone or with others. It recognizes the right of prisoners to communicate with and receive visits from their chosen religious counselor. It stipulates these rights may be limited by law during a state of emergency or by a law that considers, among other things, the interests of defense; public safety, order, morality, or health; regional or town planning; or the general public interest. Any such law must not impose greater restrictions on these rights than is necessary to achieve the purpose of the law. Although the law restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association in practice, it specifies that it is not meant to apply to public gatherings "held exclusively for bona fide religious, educational, recreational, sporting, or charitable purposes."

The Marriages Act, which took effect in September, prohibits marriages under the age of 18. The act explicitly recognizes the roles of faith leaders practicing Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and “any religion” to solemnize marriages according to the rites of their respective faiths. The criminal code prohibits statements that are “insulting” or “grossly provocative” and that cause offense to persons of a particular race, tribe, place of origin, color, creed, or religion, or intend to cause such offense. Individuals convicted under this law are subject to a fine, imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year, or both.

The government does not require religious groups to register, although religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups, as well as schools and medical facilities run by religious groups, may receive tax-exempt status. Income earned by churches and religious institutions from trade and investments, however, is subject to taxes. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, which generally grants these requests. To obtain tax-exempt status, a group is required to bring a letter of approval from a church umbrella organization confirming the group’s status as a religious group. Examples of approval letter-granting organizations include the ZCBC, ZCC, the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe, and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority generally grants a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days of receipt.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on Christianity and including other religious groups, with an emphasis on religious tolerance. Respect for ethical humanism, agnosticism, and atheism is not part of the curriculum. There is no provision for opting out of religious instruction courses at the primary level. Students may opt out at the secondary level beginning at age 14, when they begin to choose their courses. The government does not regulate religious education in private schools but must approve the employment of headmasters and teachers at those schools. Private schools run by religious organizations may take religious affiliation into account in their admission decisions and may mandate that students participate in religious rites.

Some vaccinations are required for public school enrollment, but not for private schools.

It is unconstitutional to recite the national pledge in schools on the grounds that that would be a violation of students’ right to freedom of conscience. The pledge includes the phrase “Almighty God.”

The law requires all international NGOs registered as PVOs, including religiously affiliated NGOs, to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government defining the NGO's activities and zones of geographic coverage. The law stipulates international NGOs "shall not digress into programs that are not specified in the MOU as agreed upon by line ministries and registered by the Registrar." Local NGOs, including those that are faith-based, have no legal requirements to sign an MOU with the government but "shall, prior to their registration, notify the local authorities of their intended operations." The law gives the government the authority to "deregister any private voluntary organization that fails to comply with its conditions of registration."

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Media outlets reported that on June 10, armed Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) officers arrested 34 bishops, pastors, and worshippers attending a Zimbabwe Divine Destiny network prayer meeting for unlawful gathering and disorderly conduct. According to media reports, police beat some of the congregants before the arrests. Zimbabwe Divine Destiny's leader, Bishop Ancelimo Magaya, said worshippers were targeted out of a perception that the prayer meeting was political but also said they had notified police in advance and had received word they could proceed with the meeting. Following the arrests, presidential spokesperson George Charamba said in his Saturday column in the state-controlled newspaper *The Herald* that Magaya's prayer session under the auspices of his "Zimbabwe We Want" campaign was partisan and political. Magaya described the campaign as explaining how churches and citizens supported a vision for reaching national goals. According to one of the arrested individuals, 24 of the 34 were pressured into pleading guilty, paid fines, and were released. At the end of the year, 10 individuals who chose not to pay a fine and accept guilt were still reporting regularly to court to meet their bail terms; the government said it was still conducting investigations, and their cases had been deferred to a scheduled January 2023 trial.

According to press reports, on July 9, the ZRP arrested Kanyenzura Parare, Bishop of the Mirirai Jehovha Apostolic Church and head of the opposition Zimbabwe Transformative Party, along with 34 other church members. Authorities charged Parare with violating the law for convening a gathering and leading a procession of his church members without notifying ZRP. The 34 church members were held for four months until their November trial, when they were released with \$18 fines for criminal nuisance for singing gospel songs against the government and blocking pedestrian and vehicle traffic. At the end of the year, Parare remained in jail pending trial.

Religious and civil society groups reported increased government monitoring of public events, prayer rallies, church congregations, and activities of religiously-affiliated NGOs perceived to be critical of the government. NGOs and religious leaders continued to report that security services targeted some religious officials who engaged in political discourse perceived as negative toward the government. According to faith leaders, intelligence officials asked churches to send them transcripts or recordings of specific sermons thought to be critical of the government.

According to one faith leader, security services targeted religious officials who criticized what they described as the government's politicized distribution of food aid.

In October, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights represented Apostolic Mugodhi Church members in a successful court case against a Honde Valley traditional leader, Headman Mandeya, who had required each household to pay \$25 for a traditional rain-making ceremony. The Apostolic worshippers refused, stating it was against their religious beliefs. Mandeya also barred church members from practicing their faith and blocked access to their shrine until payment was made. The court ordered Mandeya to allow church members to practice their faith and blocked him from collecting money for the rain-making ceremonies.

In June, officials published proposed amendments to the PVO Act in the government *Gazette*, and authorities moved ahead with parliamentary procedures to amend the PVO Act. If passed, members of civil society stated, the amendments would require all trusts to register as PVOs, including faith-based organizations with no transitional provisions. According to civil society representatives, the amendments would also increase reporting requirements for PVOs, impose vague and potentially arbitrary registration requirements that could limit legitimate civil society work, ban immoral or illegitimate funding sources (without defining what these are), criminalize work perceived to support or work against any political party or candidate, set civil and criminal penalties for lack of compliance, and allow the government to suspend board members and replace them with government-appointed trustees who could control a PVO's funding and operations, with few limitations.

Civil society representatives and the religious community criticized the PVO bill for limiting rights of assembly and expression. Civil society representatives reported Parliament held public hearings on the bill, but more than one was disrupted by violence from supporters of the bill against its opponents. A ZHOCD statement said, "if the bill becomes law, it has the potential of complicating the charity and humanitarian services that churches provide through their health, education, church, and para-church organizations that are currently registered as trusts." Restrictions on faith-based funders located overseas "may also expose vulnerable

groups to extreme poverty.” One church source said, however, the government assured church groups the bill would not negatively affect them. If the bill limited other civil society activities, church leaders said they anticipated needing to fill in gaps. Some local faith-based organizations also reported increased demands by local governments for an MOU, despite there being no legal basis for the requests.

In August, the online independent publication *NewsHawks* reported that the ruling ZANU-PF party had intensified outreach to religious groups due to an April Afrobarometer survey indicating both a close presidential race among likely 2023 candidates and that religious leaders were the nation’s most trusted figures (71 percent support) compared to other individuals and institutions. Journalists reported President Emmerson Mnangagwa, First Lady Auxillia Mnangagwa, Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, and cabinet ministers visited several churches and faith-based schools and clinics. Some citizens said ZANU-PF in its outreach targeted Indigenous African churches, which they said have large followings in mostly rural areas, where approximately 60 percent of voters reside.

At an August 25 meeting with Johane Masowe Vadzidzi Vajesu Apostolic members, *NewsDay* reported President Mnangagwa said “If you vote against ZANU-PF, you are going against God. This is the party sent by God to liberate the people of Zimbabwe.” *NewsDay* reported that the church’s shrine leader Ishmael Magodi echoed Mnangagwa’s message at the same event: “One of our 10 commandments is that you have to support ZANU-PF to be our member. We are promising to give you one million votes.” *NewsHawks* said insiders believed President Mnangagwa provided Magodi with a large security team at the shrine amid a struggle for leadership of the church. *New Zimbabwe* reported that a ZANU-PF supporter addressed hundreds of African Apostolic Church members saying their leader, Paul Mwazha, had instructed that “anyone who votes against ZANU-PF will be chased out of the church” and “None of you will be harassed as long as we are there, as long as the President is there.”

While some Apostolic leaders promised votes for a particular party, Registrar-General Henry Machiri said one challenge for the national identity documents drive that ran from April to September was that some Apostolic churches still renounced birth, death, and identity documents that are a precondition for voter registration. At a Johanne the Fifth of Africa International Prayer Day for Peaceful Elections that the ZANU-PF political commissar attended, leader Bishop Andby said a vision told him “ED” (President Mnangagwa’s initials) would win the 2023 elections and that he prayed for a peaceful victory. One Apostolic leader contrasted what he characterized as the genuine dialogue possible among Apostolic bishops around sensitive topics such as vaccination and ending child marriage with what he said were the still taboo or “no-go issues” of democracy, constitutionalism, and voting. A widely circulated video on social media in July showed Habbakuk Apostolic Faith Mission Church

bishop and ZANU-PF member Abton Mashayanyika telling a ZANU-PF meeting the political “down with Chamisa” slogan literally meant killing opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) President Nelson Chamisa. On October 28, the national television station ZBC broadcast a statement by Church of Zimbabwe Bishop Morris Brown Gwedegwe in solidarity with the ruling party at its 7th National Congress. Gwedegwe said he was speaking on behalf of the ZCC, but the ZCC responded that it was not invited to the event and denied that Gwedegwe spoke on its behalf.

One Christian organization said it established during the year a program of work on religious freedom in the country because it said the government and ZANU-PF increasingly sought to use religious institutions for political objectives. Another faith leader said after failing to successfully use traditional churches for the party’s campaigns, ZANU-PF created or elevated religious groups to new levels to garner support for party objectives and to try to legitimize political activities as church sanctioned. This leader identified one such progovernment group as the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) founded in 2020, whose name and acronym the person described as intentionally similar to other Christian organizations. The government requested other Christian groups to join ZIICC in discussions with it. Leaders of longer established mainline Christian organizations described successful ecumenical engagement with ZIICC on several issues, including national dialogue and healing and continued productive dialogue with the government. ZIICC’s patron and founder Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, leader of the Zion Christian Church, urged support for the government and criticized other Christian leaders who were critical of the government.

District councilor and evangelist Idirashe Dongo led Pastors 4ED (Economic Development and President Mnangagwa’s initials), with a goal of enrolling 1,600 church leaders across Christian denominations to campaign for 2023 ZANU-PF candidates. The *Standard* reported some pastors said they were added to Pastors 4ED WhatsApp groups without their consent and coerced to rejoin if they exited the group. The *Sunday News* reported that Apostolic and Zion church leaders launched a parallel organization, Vapostori for ED, using another name for Apostolics.

United Family International Church leader Emmanuel Makandiwa, who hosted President Mnangagwa for an Easter service, later elicited an uproar on social media when he was interpreted to excuse corruption that only stole 50 percent of state funds: “There is a certain level where there will be \$10 billion for road construction, of which \$5 billion is swindled and \$5 billion is used for the construction. That corruption is different from other corruption because all of the \$10 billion could be squandered.”

Following the 2021 death in childbirth of Anna Machaya, a 15-year-old member of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, and considerable

activism against child marriage by civil society and faith-based organizations, the government enacted the Marriages Act in September, which prohibited marriage below the age of 18. News reports said Anna's parents were charged and fined for trying to deceive investigators and her 26-year-old husband, Momberume, was arrested, charged, released on bail, and disappeared before a scheduled court date in November. Authorities did not locate him by year's end. Faith leaders and NGOs working to combat child marriage said much more needed to be done to enforce the new marriage law and end child marriage and pregnancies.

The head of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs said he was pleased with the inclusion of Islamic marriage rites in the Marriages Act. The act explicitly recognized the roles of faith leaders practicing Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and "any religion" to solemnize marriages according to the rites of their faiths. Several churches welcomed parts of the Marriages Act, but some remained concerned by the discrepancy between the age of consent outside of marriage (16) and the age of marriage (18).

Most official state and school gatherings and functions continued to include nondenominational Christian prayers, as did political party gatherings and parastatal meetings. Members of the judiciary and government officials, upon assuming office, often swore on the Bible, but this was not required.

The government continued to enforce a 2018 ban on all radio and state-run television programs advertising prophets and traditional healing, for example selling "tickets to heaven" or a traditional cure for HIV/AIDS, but the sources stated that the proliferation of online media made these bans less effective.

Churches reported working with the Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services to help improve living conditions in prison facilities; fund prisoner examinations for continuing education; provide masks, clothes, and food to inmates; and deliver humanitarian, pastoral, and psycho-social counseling services to inmates and former inmates within COVID-19 prevention protocols.

Several faith leaders who said they valued separation between church and state said it would be inappropriate for them to join the ruling ZANU-PF-led Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) platform, since they were nonpolitical. They urged the creation of a more suitable multistakeholder platform for what they said would be a more comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue to resolve the problems and challenges facing the country. One faith leader said electoral reform and elections would not resolve underlying national challenges. Vice President Chiwenga urged church leaders to encourage opposition CCC leader Chamisa to join POLAD and put the interests of the nation ahead of what he termed as personal political gain. Chamisa said he preferred a dialogue with

President Mnangagwa facilitated by the religious community and civil society to avoid a disputed election in 2023.

During the year, churches and faith-based organizations continued to distribute copies of the constitution and led dialogues on citizen rights. Church organizations continued to coordinate, cooperate, and communicate with the government, the security sector, and independent commissions supporting democracy. Some church leaders expressed their communities' concerns that legislation such as the Data Protection Act was used to arrest journalists and proposed legislation such as the PVO Amendment bill would limit freedom of assembly and expression and further shrink a closing civic space. Their further concerns included escalating political and electoral violence ahead of the year's by-elections and 2023 general elections, what they described as the slow alignment of existing laws with the constitution, corruption, justice, and manipulation of legal systems, also known as lawfare, against those the government deemed a threat.

The government engaged religious leaders to address COVID-19 misinformation and promote COVID-19, measles, and polio vaccination campaigns among their members and communities.

State funding supported some religious schools. During a visit to the Gandanzara Shrine in October, President Mnangagwa pledged state assistance for construction of a state-of-the-art primary and secondary boarding school at the shrine for members of the Apostolic Johane Masowe Gospel of God Church International. Primary and Secondary Education Minister Evelyn Ndllovu said that the church's students from across the country needed to travel to Kenya to continue their education after grade seven. The church's acting general secretary suggested the school would be nonsectarian. Other faiths said they are not receiving similar state support.

In May, the *Herald* reported the government stopped operations of a Kuwait royal family-funded, Muslim-run private voluntary organization, Direct Aid, which had exceeded the terms of its MOU by establishing a secondary school. The closing affected 300 students. A member of Parliament wrote about a similar halt to Direct Aid support at Jinkston Primary School in Norton but added that confusion about the school's administration and curriculum had been resolved and an approved local curriculum would be used.

President Mnangagwa and the president of the National Council of Chiefs launched two manuals in October to instruct traditional chiefs on how to guide community consultation and engagement to resolve grievances associated with 1980s-era Gukurahundi massacres that involved mass killings of mainly Ndebele civilians by government forces. Matabeleland chiefs were encouraged to continue the process of truth telling and

reconciliation hearings at the community level. Church leaders were scheduled to participate as panelists in public hearings. Church and civic organizations continued to meet and support traditional chiefs and faith leaders to implement this effort in affected communities through training and dialogue. Churches also led several efforts to support local communities and build social cohesion as the national government transferred power to local communities.

By-elections to fill parliamentary and local authority vacancies restarted in March after a 17-month pause due to COVID-19. ZHOCD issued a widely negotiated statement, "The Elections We Want," calling for free, fair, and peaceful elections without hate language, with fair access to every community by all political parties, all parties able to lawfully campaign, and professional, nonpartisan conduct of security forces. Catholic institutions such as the National Movement of Catholic Students engaged young voters through their Pray, Register, Vote campaign. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the ZCC trained and deployed election observers. ZCC's "I Pray I Vote" campaign called for the end of political violence and urged eligible citizens to register to vote. The ZCC issued a by-election observation report acknowledging what it termed as positive strides made by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission in areas such as voter registration, gender sensitivity, and professional conduct, but also pointing to areas for improvement such as willingness to provide a credible voters' roll, ensuring polling station accessibility to people with disabilities and elderly voters, selective application of the law, police deterrence of opposition party campaign events, and deterrence of violence.

A measles outbreak that began in April killed more than 700 persons and infected more than 7,000, mostly children. The first cases occurred among members of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Sources stated that large national gatherings such as the church's Passover ceremony, attended by President Mnangagwa, helped spread the disease. Religious leaders and newspapers reported faith-based vaccine hesitancy and said that COVID-19 impacts on routine immunization contributed to the outbreak. Members of the Apostolic community varied greatly in their approach to general vaccinations. A 2017 study noted the percentage of Apostolic children vaccinated ranged from 14 to 100, depending on the vaccine in question. The government engaged faith leaders directly to promote large-scale measles and polio vaccination efforts, with Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa and journalists reporting increased vaccination among Apostolic Christians.

UNICEF reported in June a district medical officer said religious beliefs and fear about vaccine safety contributed to parents pulling their children from class and students running into the bushes to avoid the government's voluntary COVID-19 vaccination drives in schools for students 12 and older. Faith leaders were encouraged to serve as role

models and promote vaccination campaigns at a World Health Organization and ZCC hosted Inter-Faith Religious Leaders' Engagement on Immunization event that acknowledged a measles outbreak in Mutasa District of Manicaland Province and polio and measles outbreaks in neighboring countries. A Ministry of Health and Child Care official said, "religion has been the number one cause of low vaccine uptake."

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Several faith leaders publicly supported vaccine drives, addressed vaccine hesitancy, and worked to build acceptance of prevention protocols among their members. The Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET), Ruvheneko Rwenyenyedzi Trust, and UDICIZA promoted vaccination among Apostolics. One Johanne Marange Church leader said AWET's work convinced him to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, his first vaccination in more than 60 years with the church. A different Apostolic leader said the church required "rehabilitation" after admitting to the "transgression" of receiving a COVID-19 vaccination.

Christian and Muslim leaders said engaging youth, combatting corruption, and programs to deter drug use among youth were among the country's most critical priorities.

Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe President Sheikh Ishmail Duma said the council helped establish COVID-19 protocols for Islamic prayer, participated in national prayer days, and organized interfaith soccer tournaments. Muslim groups provided free wells in the nation's capital, and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs led interfaith soccer tournaments for engagement with other religions. According to media, in public discourse, Islamic religious practices – especially the call to prayer at dawn – were referred to with derogatory names such as "nuisance." News reports said some Christian pastors publicly encouraged youth to give up Islam and local politicians made derogatory speeches about Muslim retailers, stating that "they are untrustworthy traders who hide money in pillows, not banks, and circulate it only in their Muslim community."

The ZIRC interfaith platform, which convened Christians and Muslims "to promote peace, reconciliation, good governance and holistic human development through interfaith action and collaboration," established a secretariat with the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs leading ZIRC's President's Council and ZCBC serving as chair of ZIRC's Executive Council. ZIRC members participated in training to protect and empower children, families, and communities, and facilitated workshops among member councils on issues including combating gender-based violence and drug and child abuse.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In meetings with the government, embassy officials raised concerns about the likely impacts of the draft PVO Amendment bill on faith-based and other NGOs and their ability to provide essential services, if enacted in its current form.

In October, the Chargé met with the leaders of the ZHOCD and its four member networks, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the UDACIZA, the ZCBC, and the ZCC. Embassy officials met with ZHOCD leaders, the ZIRC chair, the president and youth leaders of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe, the Johane the Fifth of Africa International Apostolic Church, Jewish religious leaders, and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country and the role of religious leaders in national reconciliation. In various meetings and settings, embassy officials urged religious leaders to support vaccination and expressed appreciation to religious leaders for their continued efforts to promote peace, human rights, and social cohesion. Embassy representatives maintained regular contact with religious leaders in person and through email, telephone, and social messaging applications to encourage support for religious diversity and tolerance.

The embassy's social media platforms encouraged respectful engagement on religious topics.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and
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(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
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