



Angola

International Religious Freedom Report 2003

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 481,351 square miles, and its population is approximately 13 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the country's population, with Roman Catholicism as the country's largest single denomination. The Roman Catholic Church claims 5 million adherents, but such figures could not be verified. The major Protestant denominations also are present, along with a number of indigenous African and Brazilian Christian denominations. The largest Protestant denominations, which include Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God, claim to have 3 million to 5 million adherents. The largest syncretic religious group is the Kimbanguist Church, whose followers believe that a mid-20th century Congolese pastor named Joseph Kimbangu was a prophet. A small portion of the country's rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is a small Islamic community based around migrants from West Africa. There are few atheists in the country.

In colonial times, the country's coastal populations primarily were Catholic while the Protestant mission groups were active in the interior. With the massive social displacement caused by 26 years of civil war, this rough division no longer is valid.

Foreign missionaries were very active prior to independence in 1975, although the Portuguese colonial authorities expelled many Protestant missionaries and closed mission stations based on the belief that the missionaries were inciting pro-independence sentiments. Missionaries have been able to return to the country since the early 1990s. Following the signing of the April 4, 2002 cease-fire agreement between the Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), missionaries returned to the interior of the country as the security situation improved.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministries of Justice and Culture by providing general background information. The Government has closed unregistered religious groups. In May, a draft law to establish stricter criteria for the registration of religious groups was sent by the Council of Ministers to the National Assembly for approval. The legislation sets benchmarks for the number of adherents and congregations around the country in order to qualify for legal status. Colonial-era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from the country; while those statutes still exist, they no longer are in effect. In early 2002, the colonial-era law granting civil registration authority to the religious groups

was put back into effect.

The Government permits religious organizations and missions to establish and operate schools.

The country's religious leaders have taken an active role in promoting the peace and national reconciliation process.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Minister of Justice has publicly warned that the colonial-era law banning non-Christian religions, while not enforced, still was the law and could be enforced against any radical religious groups advocating terrorism or public disturbances.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In February, government officials sharply criticized Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia for broadcasting criticism of the Government by participants of call-in shows.

Following the demobilization of UNITA after the April 4, 2002 cease-fire, there were no reports of restrictions on religious freedom in former UNITA-held territory.

In October 2002, the provincial government of Cabinda banned 17 religious groups for not being registered, for endangering lives with the unauthorized practice of medicine on the groups' members, and for illegally holding religious services in residences.

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There is a functioning ecumenical movement, particularly in support of the peace and reconciliation movement. Groups involved include the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA) and the Catholic Pro Peace movement.

Clergy members continued to criticize the growing number of unregistered religious groups in rural provinces. There also was growing hostility against traditional religions that involve shamans.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Embassy officials and official visitors from the United States routinely meet with the country's religious leaders in the context of peacekeeping, democratization, development, and humanitarian relief efforts. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society movement and are consulted regularly by embassy officials. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, the Country Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and others, maintain an ongoing dialog with the leaderships of all of the country's religious denominations. The U.S. Government provides financial support to Radio Ecclesia to increase their public affairs and news programming as an independent alternative source of information to citizens.

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