



U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Angola

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ANGOLA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

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

The Government does not require religious groups to register. Colonial era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from Angola; while those statutes still exist, they are no longer in effect.

Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the country's population of 10 to 12 million, with Roman Catholicism 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 include the Methodists, Baptists, United Church of Christ, and Congregationalists. 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 also a number of government officials whose adherence to dialectical materialism includes atheism.

In colonial times, the country's coastal populations were primarily Catholic while the Protestant mission groups were active in the interior. With the massive social displacement caused by 25 years of civil war, this rough division is no longer valid.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. The post-independence Government was a one-party state until 1991 and nationalized all church schools and clinics. Missionaries have been able to return to the country since the early 1990's although security conditions due to the civil war have made it impossible for them to return to most parts of the interior.

Members of the clergy in government-held areas regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In 1996 a German clergyman was charged with subversive activities for speaking out on social issues, but there were no reported cases of such charges during the period covered by this report.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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

While in general the rebel group UNITA permitted freedom of religion, interviews with persons who left UNITA-controlled areas revealed that the clergy did not enjoy the right to criticize UNITA policies.

In January 1999, unknown gunmen killed Father Albino Saluaco, a Catholic parish priest, and two catechists in a town in the province of Huambo that was under UNITA military occupation. Father Saluaco had served as deputy director of a project to reintegrate child soldiers into their families.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

There are amicable relations between the country's religious denominations, and there is a functioning ecumenical movement, particularly in support of peace.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

Embassy officials and official visitors from Washington 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. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, the Director of the Agency for International Development, and others, maintain an ongoing dialog with the leaderships of all of the country's religious denominations.