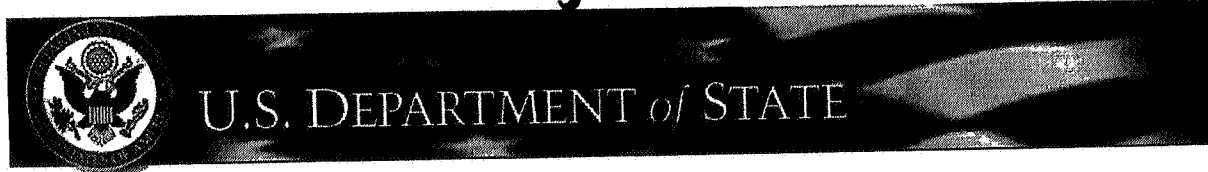


Angola (3)

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Angola

International Religious Freedom Report 2002 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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 774,200 square miles, and its population is approximately 12 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 a 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 proindependence sentiments. Missionaries have been able to return to the country since the early 1990's. Following the signing of the April 4, 2002 ceasefire agreement between the Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and missionaries were expected to be able to return to the interior of the country when the security situation improves.

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 does not require religious groups to register. 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 churches was put back into effect.

The Government permits churches and missions to establish and operate schools.

The country's religious leaders have taken an active role in promoting peace, national reconciliation and an end to the war. On March 13, the Catholic Bishop's Council of Angola and Sao Tome (CEAST) published a pastoral letter that gave immediate and unanimous support to the Government's peace plan and offered their good offices to support the peace process. The Government has welcomed CEAST's statements of support.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In October 2001, Minister Tjipilica 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.

During the civil conflict with UNITA, which ended on April 4, 2002, members of the clergy in government-held areas regularly criticized government policies. There were unconfirmed reports that in May 2001, the state radio censored remarks made by the Archbishop of Lubango, Dom Zacarias Kamuenho. The remarks included publicly criticisms of both the Government and UNITA on behalf of the Catholic Church. They came in the wake of a UNITA raid on the town of Caxito on May 5, 2001. Despite censoring remarks on the state radio, the Government permitted Dom Zacharia's statement to be broadcast in full on Catholic Radio Ecclesia.

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. However, following the end of the civil conflict, UNITA was being demilitarized, and it was unclear what the situation was in former UNITA-held territory.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, 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 peace. Groups involved in the peace movement include the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA) and the Catholic Pro Peace movement.

Clergy members also began to criticize the growing numbers of religious groups in the Lunda provinces and in Uige. 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.

Released on October 7, 2002

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