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2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Angola

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. The constitution requires the state to protect churches and religious groups as long as they comply with the law. The law increases the penalties for crimes committed because of religion or religious belief and sets criminal penalties for hate speech or inciting hate by other forms of communication based on religious belief. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting legally established criteria and allows the government to close the premises of unregistered groups. There are 85 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups in the country.

The government recognized four new Christian religious groups during the year. During the year, the government took actions in connection with the ongoing dispute between pastors over leadership of the Brazilian-origin Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD in Portuguese), which split the church into two groups; one linked to the IURD in Brazil and the other based in Angola. In March, an Angolan court convicted a leader of the of the Brazil-linked group for forcing pastors to undergo vasectomies but suspended his sentence. The

court also acquitted him and three other church leaders on money laundering, tax fraud and criminal association charges, stemming from allegations against them in 2020. In April, leaders of the Brazil-linked group announced that their facilities would reopen, pursuant to court order. The National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR) stated the group's temples (churches) would not be opened until they were transferred to the Angolan IURD, which was the only one recognized by the government; that did not happen by year's end. Except for 11 opened in 2021, the IURD temples remained closed during the year.

Before the August 24 presidential election, Christian religious groups met with political leaders in an ecumenical celebration urging voters to engage in peaceful and free elections. Representatives of the Roman Catholic church were among the official election observers, who were led by Gabriel Mbilingi, Archbishop of Lubango and former head of the Conference of Bishops of Angola and São Tomé (CEAST).

Throughout the year, officials from the U.S. embassy raised religious freedom issues with government officials at the national level, including the closure of places of worship, long-pending registration applications, and the implementation of religious freedom legislation. Embassy officials spoke with representatives of religious groups and civil society organizations throughout the country about the continuing issue of slow recognition of religious groups, the IURD intradenominational split, and the role of churches in the presidential election. The embassy promoted religious freedom on its website and through social media platforms.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 34.8 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2014 national census (the most recent), approximately 41 percent of the population are Roman Catholic and 38 percent Protestant. Individuals not associated with any religious group constitute 12 percent of the population. The remaining 9 percent is composed of animists, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, and other religious groups.

Among Protestants, members of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the World (Tocoists) are the largest group, with 2.8 million adherents, according to the INAR. The IURD reports it has 500,000 members. Other major Protestant denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Baptists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), and the Assembly of God Pentecostal. There is also a small number of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country.

INAR reports that in 2018, the most recent data available, there were 122,000 Muslims, although Muslim groups estimate that the number has grown considerably since that time. A leader of one Muslim organization estimated there are 800,000 Muslims in the country, of whom approximately 95 percent are foreign migrants, mainly from North and West African countries. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily resident foreign nationals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination. The constitution requires the state to protect churches and religious groups, as long as they comply with the law. The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship, and it recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities, as long as they adhere to the law. The constitution permits conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies the government may not suspend rights related to religion even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from, and correspond with, religious counselors. The law establishes that conscientious objectors may perform civilian service as an alternative to military service.

The penal code increases penalties for crimes committed because of religion or religious belief, including homicide, verbal or physical assault, discrimination, persecution, defamation, and genocide. Penalties for such crimes are variable and not based on a formula. For example, the punishment for willful homicide is 14-20 years in prison, while the punishment for willful homicide carried out on the basis of religious hatred is 20-25 years in prison. Hate speech, or inciting hate by other forms of communication, based on religious belief is punishable by imprisonment between six months and six years in prison. Impeding or disturbing a religious service or a funeral also carries criminal penalties.

The law requires religious groups to register to receive government recognition and allows the government to close the premises of unregistered groups. Legal recognition gives a religious group the ability to purchase property and use its property to hold religious events, exempts it from paying certain property and import taxes, and authorizes the group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system. The law requires 60,000 member signatures from legal residents to apply for registration and requires that at least 1,000 of the

signatures originate from members residing in each of the country's 18 provinces. Each signature and resident declaration must be notarized separately. Religious groups must also submit documents defining their organizational structure, location, methods and schedule of worship, financial resources, and planned construction projects. The law also establishes qualification requirements for clergy and requires religious doctrine to conform to the principles and rights outlined in the constitution.

The Ministry of Culture, through INAR, is the adjudication authority for the registration process and has an oversight role for religious activities. INAR assists religious groups through the registration process and analyzes religious doctrine to ensure that it is consistent with the constitution. There are 85 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups in the country. The Baha'i Faith and the World Messianic Church remained the only two non-Christian registered religious organizations. The other recognized religious groups include 54 Protestant denominations such as the Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches; the Church of Jesus Christ; 28 African Messianic denominations; and the Catholic Church.

Under a Framework Agreement with the Holy See, the government recognizes Catholic wedding ceremonies and does not require an additional civil ceremony for Catholics seeking to wed. For all other religious groups, the government recognizes only civil wedding ceremonies.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system. Private schools are allowed to teach religion.

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

On June 6, the government recognized four religious groups: Christian Missionary Assembly; Josafat Church; United Pentecostal Church in Angola; and Presbyterian Church of Angola. These were the first religious groups recognized since 2000. INAR said that of the other applications pending since the registration process changed in 2019, 18 religious groups received conditional approval while they completed the registration requirements, and 73 groups were denied because their applications lacked various prerequisites. INAR said it suggested to some of the refused religious groups that they should join other groups with similar religious characteristics and reapply. INAR reported that many of the groups appealed

the decision both to INAR and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights; those appeals were pending at the end of the year. Some of these religious groups had been seeking registration since before 2019.

As of year's end, the government had not recognized any Muslim groups or issued any licenses to Muslim groups to practice their religion legally. The requests for official registration submitted in 2019 by two separate groups known as the Islamic Community of Angola (each has a slightly different acronym) remained among the pending applications. INAR officials continued to say the primary reason the government had not yet recognized Islamic groups was their lack of a single governing body. In the past, government officials also stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution.

Unregistered religious groups continued to state that the notary and residential declaration requirements (60,000 total notarized signatures, including 1,000 signatures from each of the country's 18 provinces), which they estimated to cost approximately 3,300 kwanza (\$7) per signature, were too expensive and burdensome for their congregations. In addition to the signature requirement, the large number of undocumented residents and an unreliable residential registry system continued to present obstacles to registration, according to religious group leaders. Government officials generally allowed groups with pending registration applications to hold religious services.

During the year, the government took actions in connection with the ongoing dispute between IURD pastors over leadership of the Brazilian-origin IURD. Since 2020, the dispute had split the church into two groups, one linked to the IURD in Brazil and the other connected with the IURD in Angola. The government only recognized the Angola-based group.

In March, a Luanda Province court convicted Honorilton Gonçalves, the local Brazilian IURD leader, on a charge of domestic violence related to forcing church pastors to undergo vasectomies, and it suspended the three-year prison sentence that would accompany that charge. Because there was no law prohibiting forced vasectomies, the court tried Gonçalves under a domestic violence law. The court also acquitted him and, in related cases, three other IURD leaders on separate charges of money laundering, tax fraud, and criminal association. The criminal charges were based on complaints made in 2020 by two Angolan IURD pastors who said they were forced to have vasectomies by church leadership and on allegations by church members that the IURD's Brazilian leadership had committed tax fraud and money laundering. The Brazilian IURD leadership was generally pleased with the acquittals and said it hoped the decision would pave the way for their temples to reopen. In 2020, the government

closed all IURD temples and ordered the removal of Gonçalves from the church's Angolan board of directors following the allegations against him and the IURD's Brazilian leadership.

On April 12, the Brazilian IURD group announced that its temples around the country would reopen, based on an order by the Luanda District Court. In a radio interview, the INAR deputy director acknowledged the court's decision but said that the IURD must first officially notify INAR, and INAR would only transfer the properties to the IURD group recognized by the government (the Angolan IURD). Police removed parishioners who had reopened several IURD temples in response to the April 12 announcement and reclosed those facilities. The government did not reopen any IURD facilities during the year. The government permitted 11 temples under Angolan IURD leadership to reopen in 2021; 340 others remained closed at the end of 2022. Civil lawsuits filed in 2021 by leaders of the IURD's Brazilian group to regain control of the temples remained pending at year's end.

In June, the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Social Communication suspended the Brazilian IURD's religious programming platforms, FÉTV (Faith TV), on DSTV and TV Cabo cable television on the grounds that the Brazilian leadership was no longer recognized in Angola.

The INAR director and Ministry of Culture officials continued to state they were concerned about the proliferation of religious "sects," some of which, they said, exploited vulnerable populations with limited financial means by requiring them to provide recurring payments or dues to worship or belong to the organizations.

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Day of Peace and National Reconciliation, on April 4, the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Environment, Filipe Zao, hosted an ecumenical gathering that included religious leaders from the Council of Christian Churches in Angola (CICA), CEAST, and the Tocoist Church. Minister Zao highlighted the role of the churches as partners of the state in social actions, such as providing health care; protecting vulnerable populations; educating children; and promoting moral, civic, patriotic, and ethical values. Reaffirming partnership with religious institutions based on mutual respect, Zao stated, "Churches are the moral reserve of our people and the guarantor of concord, reconciliation, and national unity." The event was attended by President João Lourenço.

Religious leaders continued to be part of the 23-member Council of the Republic – a President-appointed advisory board. In September, the President appointed to the council Deolinda Dorcas Teca, Secretary-General of CICA; Reverend Luis Nguimbi, President of the

Angolan Christian Forum; and Prophetess Suzete João, leader of the Theosophical Spiritist Church.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On August 21, Christian religious groups met with political leaders in an ecumenical celebration in Luanda urging voters to engage in a peaceful and free presidential election on August 24. Leaders of various Christian groups spoke during the event, calling on citizens to exercise their civic responsibility in voting. The presidential candidates also met with church leaders ahead of the elections to discuss social issues important to their congregations. Catholic Archbishop Gabriel Mbilingi led the election observer mission from the Angolan Electoral Observatory (OBEA), a collection of religious and secular civil society organizations that included the Evangelical Congregational Church and the Catholic Church. In addition to the OBEA, a group including representatives of the Angolan Christian Forum and Tocoists also observed the elections. CICA conducted civic education ahead of the election but did not participate as observers.

In addition to the Catholic radio station Ecclesia, which broadcast in 16 provinces, other Catholic (Vatican Radio and Maria Radio), Methodist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Tocoist radio stations also operated in the country under government licenses. Several religious groups had radio programs on secular radio and television stations, including Jehovah Witnesses, the IURD, and the Josafat Church.

During the year, several religious groups continued their partnership in an interfaith social action initiative called Abraço Solidário (Solidarity Embrace), which provided food to vulnerable populations affected by the severe drought in the southern provinces of Cuando Cubango, Cunene, Namibe, and Huila. Participants included the Council of Christian Churches in Angola, the Evangelical Alliance, and Catholic organizations Caritas and Justice and Peace.

Plataforma Sul (Southern Platform), composed of several faith-based organizations linked to the Catholic Church and the Protestant Congregational Evangelical Church in Angola, continued to advocate for more efficient government and social responses to problems affecting rural communities and minority ethnic groups resulting from the widespread drought, such as food shortages.

The government took no action during the year on the recommendations of a 2021 interfaith roundtable on religious freedom in the country that included as participants Catholic,

Protestant, and Muslim leaders as well as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The roundtable members recommended that the government recognize Islam as an official religion, improve dialogue with mosques around the country, not offer preferential treatment to any religious group, create an independent body to regulate national religious affairs, and update the 2004 law on religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials engaged with government officials throughout the year. In meetings and communication with officials from INAR and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, embassy representatives encouraged the government to further ease registration requirements for religious groups and discussed the status of religious groups awaiting official recognition and the implementation of existing legislation on religious freedom.

Throughout the year, embassy officials also engaged with religious communities and civil society representatives, including religious leaders and NGOs from Luanda, Moxico, Lunda Norte, Benguela, Huila, Cuando Cubango, and Cunene Provinces, as well as with representatives of religious groups and organizations such as CICA, the IURD, the Order of Angolan Evangelical Pastors, Jesuit Refugee Services, Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Islamic Community of Angola (COIA), and the Jewish group Chabad-Lubavitch. In these meetings, embassy officials discussed the ongoing issues of church recognition of religious groups, church participation in election education and observation efforts, the IURD church conflict, and interfaith topics.

The embassy promoted religious freedom on its website and through social media platforms. It used social media posts to promote the principle of religious freedom as a universal right on International Religious Freedom Day.

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