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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Cape Verde

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
July 30, 2012

[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government was active in supporting religious freedom in the country. Embassy officials paid courtesy visits to the heads of the country's major churches and reached out to human rights groups, government officials, and religious communities. Embassy officials also supported efforts to preserve three Jewish cemeteries located in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2010 Census, the country's population is 77 percent Roman Catholic; however, an informal poll taken by local churches places this figure at more than 85 percent. The second largest religious group is the Church of the Nazarene. Other groups include Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Baha'i communities and a small but growing Muslim community that has 6,008 members, according to government statistics.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves.

The penal code states that violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to a penalty of between three months and three years' imprisonment.

The constitution provides for the separation of church and state and prohibits the state from imposing any religious beliefs and practices.

The Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status, although it is not the state religion. For example, the government provides the Catholic Church with free television broadcasting time for religious services.

Registration of all associations, whether religious or secular, with the Ministry of Justice is mandatory under the constitution and the Law of Associations. The constitution sets forth the criteria for all associations, including religious ones, and states that an association may not be military or armed; may not be aimed at promoting violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship; and may not be in violation of penal law. Groups that register may apply for government or private loans and benefits as associations. In order to register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members to the Ministry of Justice; however, failure to register with the Ministry of Justice does not result in any restriction on religious belief or practice.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. In addition each municipality has a holiday to honor its Catholic patron saint.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government upheld constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and protected the rights of citizens to hold and manifest their religious beliefs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. All religious groups reported enjoying good relations with adherents of other religious beliefs, stating that inter-religious harmony and peace were hallmarks of their society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials integrated the promotion of religious freedom into ongoing discussions with the government and the citizenry. These included formal communications with the government regarding human rights concerns, public statements by embassy officials, informal discussions, and an emphasis on religious freedom as part of the embassy's social media outreach campaign. Embassy officials also supported efforts to preserve three Jewish cemeteries in the country.