

[\[Print Friendly Version\]](#)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Archive](#) | [Search](#)[About the State Department](#) | [Press & Public Affairs](#) | [Travel & Living Abroad](#)
[Countries & Regions](#) | [International Topics & Issues](#) | [History, Education & Culture](#)
[Business Center](#) | [Other Services](#) | [Employment](#)

Kenya

International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
October 2001

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, while groups generally were allowed to worship freely, the Government at times interfered with other activities by religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government at times restricted or disrupted public meetings that religious groups organized or participated in, primarily for political reasons. Muslim leaders charge that the Government is hostile towards Muslims.

There generally is a great level of tolerance among religious groups; however, there were a few instances of violence between Christian and Muslim groups, and Muslims continued to perceive themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. There are some interfaith movements and political alliances, including the Ufungamano Initiative on constitutional reform, which was led jointly by Christian, Muslim, and Hindu leaders.

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 approximately 225,000 square miles and its population is approximately 29 million, of which approximately 88 percent live in rural areas. According to rough estimates, Protestants are the largest religious group representing approximately 38 percent of the population. Approximately 28 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, while an estimated 10 to 20 percent are Muslim. Hinduism is practiced by 1 percent of the population, and the remainder follow various traditional indigenous religions or offshoots of Christian religions. There are very few atheists.

Members of most religious groups are active throughout the country. Muslims are concentrated chiefly in the coastal areas and the north and northeastern parts of the country. Muslims also are present in significant numbers in urban centers throughout the country.

Foreign missionary groups of many faiths operate in the country.

Certain religions dominate in particular regions of the country. For example, the Northeast Province is vastly Muslim; the Eastern Province is approximately 50 percent Muslim (mostly in the north) and 50 percent Christian (mostly in the south); and the Coast Province almost entirely is Muslim, except for the western areas of the province, which predominantly are Christian. The rest of the country largely is Christian, with some persons practicing traditional indigenous religions.

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; however, while groups generally were allowed to worship freely, the Government at times interfered with other activities by religious groups.

The Government requires new religious organizations to register with the Registrar of Societies, which reports to the Office of the Attorney General. The Government allows traditional indigenous religious organizations to register, although many choose not to do so. Once registered religious organizations enjoy tax-free status, and clergy are not subject to duty on purchased goods. Religious organizations generally receive equal treatment from the Government; however, some small splinter groups have found it difficult to register due to their inability to define their status as more than an offshoot of a larger religious organization. The Government has not granted registration to the Tent of the Living God, a small Kikuyu religious order

banned during the single-party era (pre-1992). However, with the arrival of a multiparty system in 1992, the Tent of the Living God virtually has disappeared.

Foreign missionary groups of various faiths operate in the country, and the Government generally has permitted their assistance to the poor and their founding of schools and hospitals. The missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs and have encountered little resistance.

In 1998 the Ministry of Information, Transport, and Communication approved radio and television broadcast licenses for a Muslim group and for a Christian group. In 1999 the Ministry licensed an Islamic radio station and three Catholic television stations. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) operates the Muslim Iqra Radio Station, which provides information, educational programming, and entertainment for Muslim audiences in Nairobi and began broadcasting in July 2000. At the end of 2000, the Catholic Church had been assigned regional broadcasting frequencies, but not national frequencies; its petition for national frequencies was not resolved by the end of the period covered by this report.

In the areas of the country that largely are Christian, there are morning prayers in public schools. All children participate in the assembly but are not punished if they remain silent during prayers.

The Government and some churches frequently disagree over school management when both the Government and the church have a stake in the school. Often churches provide the land and the buildings for the schools, and the Government provides the teachers, which has led to disputes over school management, and sometimes led to the closing of schools.

The Government celebrates several national holidays that also are religious holidays, including Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Idd-ul-Fitr, Idd-ul-Azha, and Diwali.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In May 2001, Muslims protested the reported allocation of a public plot of land to a private developer in Mombassa. The grounds traditionally have been used for celebrating Islamic events. Following the protests, the Government apparently has ceased developing plans to allocate the land, and the land remained public as of the end of the period covered by this report.

The Minister of Trade and Industry Nicholas Biwott has been engaged in a public dispute with the Catholic Church over an intended project to use public land to create an educational facility to be named after the Minister's mother. Father Michael Rop, who is in charge of the local parish where the facility is proposed, protested the appropriation of public land to honor the Minister's mother. The dispute escalated when the Eldoret Bishop, Cornelius Korir, accused the Minister of harassing Father Rop and his supporters, and claimed that the Minister was persecuting the church and its followers. The dispute was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April 2001, the High Court allowed the Buru Buru Church of God in Nairobi to reopen. Fighting between rival factions in the Church, which led to numerous injuries among worshipers, had prompted local authorities to block entry to the church on June 25, 2000, in an apparent effort to prevent renewed fighting.

In April 2000, William Ruto, Assistant Minister in the Office of the President, speaking after the discovery of "cult" killings in Uganda, was quoted as saying that the Government would crack down on religious groups that endanger the safety of their adherents; however, there was no reported harassment of religious groups, and no action was taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

Political parties must register with the Government. Despite 1997 reforms and the subsequent registration of a large number of political parties, the Government has refused to reverse its 1994 denial of registration of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) on the grounds that the IPK had been involved in a number of violent confrontations with police in 1992.

Muslim leaders have charged that the Government is hostile toward Muslims. Muslims complain that non-Muslims receive better treatment when requesting citizenship documents. According to Muslim leaders, government authorities more rigorously scrutinize the identification cards of persons with Muslim surnames and require them to present additional documentation of their citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and, sometimes, grandparents. The Government has singled out the overwhelmingly Muslim ethnic Somalis as the only group whose members are issued and required to carry an additional form of identification to prove that they are citizens. They must produce upon demand their Kenyan identification card and a second identification card verifying screening. Both cards also are required to apply for a passport. This heightened scrutiny appears to be due to an attempt to deter illegal immigration, rather than to the religious affiliation of the ethnic Somalis. Muslim leaders claim that since the August 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, government discrimination against their community has worsened.

In the past, the misuse of authority by mainly Christian security forces in the northeast, which largely is Muslim and in which banditry is widespread, had contributed to Muslim mistrust. However, during the period covered by this report, there has been greater inclusion of Muslims in security forces and provincial administration; for example, a Muslim was appointed Provincial Commissioner in the Northeast Province.

Practicing witchcraft reportedly is a criminal offense under colonial-era laws; however, persons generally are prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Witchcraft

Kenya

traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases for which the causes were unknown. The practice of witchcraft is understood widely to encompass attempts to harm others not only by magic, but also by covert means of established efficacy such as poisons. Although many traditional indigenous religions include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally approve of harmful witchcraft only for defensive or retaliatory purposes and purport to offer protection against it.

In August 1999, the Government presented to Parliament and thereby effectively published the 1994 widely-publicized report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Devil Worship. President Moi appointed the Commission in 1994 in response to public concern about a perceived resurgence of witchcraft, ritual murders, and other ostensibly "Satanic" practices associated with aspects of traditional indigenous religions. The Commission's report included numerous reports of ritual murder, human sacrifice, cannibalism, and feats of magic allegedly done by using powers acquired through such acts. It also reported that "Satanists" had infiltrated nonindigenous religious groups and other organizations, making them "doorways" to Satanism. The Commission is no longer functioning, and the Government took no action to follow up on the report.

In December 1999, a group of Christian, Muslim, and Hindu leaders formed an alternative process to reform the Constitution, the Ufungamano Initiative, which rivaled the Parliament-led process. The Government, although critical of the Ufungamano group, permitted it to proceed with its constitutional review process. In May 2001, after many months of negotiations, the Ufungamano process merged with the parliamentary process. The newly-created Constitutional Review Commission began work during the period covered by this report.

In September 1999, President Moi was quoted as saying that, for political reasons, he would not allow the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, to enter the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 30, 2001, four armed men carjacked Geoffrey Ngoima Mbugua, a minister at the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's (PCEA) Thika parish and lecturer at St. Paul's Theological Seminary. Police officers pursued the vehicle; when the armed men began shooting at the police, the police shot at the vehicle, killing Mbugua; the perpetrators escaped. No investigation into the case had occurred by the end of the period covered by this report, and it is unlikely that an investigation will be undertaken; the killing was considered to have taken place while the officers' were discharging their duties, and it does not appear that the crime was religiously motivated.

The case of two police officers, Julius Mugambi M'Nabere and Stephan Musau Kilonzo, charged with the August 1999 murder of five Muslim worshipers in the Anas Bin Malik mosque in Chai village near Mombasa remained pending before the court at the end of the period covered by this report.

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, at times the Government used sections of the Public Order Act and the Penal Code to restrict or disrupt public meetings that religious groups organized or participated in, primarily for political reasons. In April 2000, police in Laikipia broke up a gathering in a Catholic church hall on the grounds that the participants were former freedom fighters holding a secret meeting. The police arrested four men and charged them with holding an illegal meeting; the case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government historically has been unsympathetic to tribal religious groups that have engendered protest movements. The Government frequently harassed and periodically arrested and detained members of the Mungiki, a small, controversial, cultural and political movement based in part on Kikuyu ethnic traditions, which espouses political views and cultural practices that are controversial in mainstream Kenyan society. While religion may have played a role in the formation of the group, observers believe that it is not a key characteristic of the group. The Mungiki do not adhere to any single religion and members are free to choose their own religion; the group includes Muslims and Christians. The number of Mungiki members is unknown, but the group draws a significant following from the unemployed and other marginalized segments of society. The debate over the right of the Mungiki to practice their cultural traditions and advance their political agenda is ongoing.

There were no other 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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

There generally is a great level of tolerance among religious groups; however, there were a few instances of violence between adherents of different religions, and Muslims perceive themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. Inter-marriage between members of Christian denominations is common, and interfaith prayer services occur frequently. Inter-marriage between Muslims and Christians, although less frequent, also is acceptable socially, and mosques and Christian churches can be found on the same city blocks.

For years Muslims and Christians have held an open debate over their respective places in society. Each group claims to have a larger number of adherents than is plausible, and some Muslim groups believe that the Government and business communities deliberately have impeded development in predominantly Muslim areas. Some Muslim leaders claim that discrimination against Muslims has resulted in a greater incidence of poverty among Muslims than among other religious groups; however, there is no statistical evidence to support this claim. At times the debate has undermined mutual trust.

There were a few instances of violence between adherents of different religions. A number of incidents took place in November and December 2000, when a land dispute led to violence between Muslims and Christians in a densely populated neighborhood in Nairobi. At least one person was killed and numerous persons were injured in the riots, including Anglican Archbishop David Gitari. Two days of violent clashes resulted in the burning of several buildings, including a mosque and two churches. After the riots ended, Cabinet Minister Sharif Nassir admitted that he had encouraged Muslim youths to retaliate when attacked. Muslim leaders apologized for the violence and clarified that the dispute originated over land and was not religiously-motivated. Following the riots, religious leaders on both sides cited police inaction as a reason for the spread of the violence.

In March 2001, Hannah Mungai, a member of the Akorino religious group (a group that mixes traditions based on the Old Testament with indigenous beliefs) left her three children with an evangelist member of the religious group while she toured western areas of the country on a preaching mission. When she returned, the pastor of the religious group returned two of the children; however, he invoked the name of the Holy Spirit and refused to return the youngest child stating that the 2-year-old girl would remain with him to serve at the altar of the church. Mungai did not report the kidnapping to the police because the religious group does not allow challenges to "men of God" once they invoke the name of the Holy Spirit; however, she later publicized the story after pressure from her husband. Mungai claims that her daughter was given to other religious group members, and she does not know where her daughter is being kept. The matter had not been brought formally to police attention by the end of the period covered by this report.

On August 24, 2000, Father John Anthony Kaiser, a Catholic priest working in the country for over 30 years, was found dead near Naivasha town. Father Kaiser was a vocal human rights activist and a critic of key members of the Government. Although there was much public speculation to the contrary, a U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) report, released in April 2001, concluded that the evidence collected was most consistent with suicide, and that it was unlikely that Father Kaiser had been murdered. The Catholic Church has rejected the FBI report and has called for further independent investigation.

There have been reports of intolerance among refugee groups in Kenya. Somali refugees reportedly have attacked relatives who marry refugees belonging to faiths other than Islam. Somali refugees at the Dadaab camps also reportedly have attacked verbally and physically Sudanese refugee women who wear Westernized clothing considered "too revealing" under Somali standards.

There continued to be reports of ritual murders associated with aspects of traditional indigenous religious rites. The victims, generally teenage children, reportedly were killed and parts of their bodies removed for use in traditional rituals by persons seeking renewed youth or health. The report of the 1994 Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Devil Worship, presented to the Parliament in August 1999, contained similar reports from recent years. In September 2000, police in Nairobi reportedly alerted residents to a growing number of ritual murders after a 7-year-old girl was found murdered. A woman was arrested 1 week earlier for allegedly abducting a child.

Occasionally mobs killed members of their communities on suspicion that they practiced witchcraft or were devil worshippers. There were several reports of the public beating "suspicious-looking" persons who were accompanied by small children. On October 3, 2000, a mob of residents of Nairobi's Kariobangi North neighborhood lynched three suspected child abductors (believed to be devil worshippers), including a grandfather who was walking with his grandchild. In late October 2000, in Kisii, police intervened to block villagers from killing seven suspected witches. Also in October 2000, the press reported that villagers burned alive a suspected sorcerer in Kimburini. In another incident, a mob attacked a group of American Missionaries in Kisumu, whom it suspected to be on a mission to abduct children.

There have been societal efforts to bridge religious divides. The Inter-Faith Peace Movement represents a broad religious spectrum, and its members include the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims, the Muslim Consultative Council, the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, the Inland African Church, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and the Hindu Council. The National Council of Churches in Kenya generally is involved in a variety of civil society initiatives, including conflict resolution.

In December 1999, a group of Christian, Muslim, and Hindu leaders formed an alternative process to reform the Constitution, the Ufungamano Initiative (see Section II). The Initiative, which originally opposed the Parliament-led process, merged with the Government-backed Parliamentary process in March 2001, and the bill that finalized the merger was passed and signed by the President in May 2001.

On November 26, 2000, in Kisumu, progovernment youths forcibly disrupted a meeting of the Ufungamano Initiative. The youths threw homemade bombs, burned a vehicle, and beat several persons severely. Police did not intervene.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy made a concerted effort to bridge the gaps that exist between Muslims and Christians. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with leaders and members of all religious communities. The Ambassador and other embassy officers met with Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim leaders while traveling. The Ambassador regularly hosts meetings with religious leaders to discuss issues affecting their communities. In May 2001, the Ambassador and senior embassy officers traveled to Mombasa to host a public forum at which members of the predominantly Muslim coastal community could meet embassy officials and gain a better understanding of U.S. policy and activities. While in Mombasa, the Ambassador also met with Christian leaders to listen to their concerns and to explain U.S. policies and programs. The Ambassador used the occasion to explain personally the conclusions of the April 2001 FBI report on the death of Father John Kaiser.

[End]

Released on October 26, 2001

International Religious Freedom Report Home Page

This site is managed by the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

