

ANGOLA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of religion. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting rigorous criteria. In April the Huambo provincial court convicted Jose Kalupeteka, leader of the Light of the World Church, and nine of his followers for killing nine police officers in a clash between police and members of the religious group in April 2015. The government stated publicly it was concerned about the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which the government said exploited vulnerable populations and threatened domestic stability. The government has not recognized any new religious groups since passage of a law on religion in 2004. While many unregistered religious groups continued to operate with tacit acceptance, the government continued not to take formal action to recognize many of these religious groups, including Muslim groups. During the year, the government attempted to bring unrecognized Christian groups together in associations that could receive government recognition en masse, requesting those groups actively support government requests and not engage in illegal practices. Some religious leaders, civil society members, and media outlets accused the government of trying to coerce religious groups to align themselves with the ruling party in exchange for authorization to operate freely. The government was also accused of destroying some places of worship in locations where it exercised eminent domain authorities to accommodate private development.

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations continued to criticize publicly the proliferation of smaller, unrecognized religious groups. Newer and more established religious groups traded accusations of corruption and profiting from their members’ personal assets. Governmental organizations as well as some religious associations called for all new religious groups to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations.

U.S. embassy representatives promoted religious freedom and tolerance with the government, encouraging government officials to allow all people to worship freely and to ease restrictions on the registration of new religious groups. The embassy also continued to monitor cases involving government tensions with religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 25.7 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2014 national census, approximately 41 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 38 percent Protestant. Individuals not associated with any religion constitute 12 percent of the population. The remaining 10 percent is composed of animists, Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups. According to the government, most Muslims are immigrants from North, West, and East Africa. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily foreign residents.

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 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 objections, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies that religious rights may not be suspended 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 religious freedom law requires religious groups to register for legal recognition from the state. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property collectively, use their property to hold religious events, exempt them from paying certain property taxes, and authorize the group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system. To apply for government recognition, a religious group must collect 100,000 member signatures from 12 of the 18 provinces and submit them to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The law also requires religious groups to submit documents defining their doctrine, organizational structure, methods of worship, and leadership, and the amount of time the group has operated in the country. While the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights is responsible for registration and recognition of religious groups, oversight of religious organizations is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture through its National Institute for Religious Affairs.

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 April 5, the Huambo provincial court convicted Jose Kalupeteka, the leader of the Light of the World Church, and nine of his followers for killing nine police officers in a clash between police and members of the sect in April 2015.

Kalupeteka was sentenced to 28 years in prison. According to official figures, 13 civilians were also killed in the clash. Opposition parties reported the clash resulted in a much higher casualty rate, but figures vary widely and remain unconfirmed.

On August 9, new clashes between police and Light of the World followers in Kwanza Sul Province reportedly resulted in the deaths of five sect members and three police officers. The media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported security forces confronted followers in the same area on August 13, resulting in an unknown number of casualties. The government stated the attorney general's office was investigating the case, but could not confirm if there were any casualties from the August 13 incident.

In August the government reported several other incidents involving the Light of the World Church and continued to state that some of the group's practices were destabilizing to social order, such as prohibiting schooling and vaccination of its children.

In July in Mbanza Congo in Zaire Province, religious leader Manuel Nvika was sentenced to three months in jail for disobedience and contempt of court after failing to remove a head covering during a judicial hearing after his group had split from the Christian Union of the Holy Spirit Church. Fifteen other followers were arrested during the trial for contempt of court after the judge ordered Nvika to uncover his head during the proceedings, an act the group stated it considered blasphemous.

In April the press reported that Jorge Mpata, a religious leader from the Evangelic Community for the Prosperity of the Souls, was arrested and charged with harboring illegal immigrants in the northern province of Cabinda. Mpata said his arrest was a result of his refusal to support the ruling party. Authorities

subsequently banned his church. Civil society organizations reported the government has been pressuring churches to support the government in the lead-up to planned elections in August 2017.

The government stated publicly it was concerned about the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which it said used methods that exploited vulnerable populations, especially the poor, and threatened domestic stability.

The government did not make progress on the issue of recognizing new religious groups. The government has officially recognized 81 religious groups, all Christian, but has not recognized a new religious group since 2004, when the current application system was created. A large number of groups continue to await recognition despite having submitted several applications for registration. In 2015, the government estimated that approximately 1300 religious groups were operating without government recognition, often providing education and medical care to their members despite no legal authority to do so.

In some instances, the government disbanded religious organizations and organizations operating without government recognition, and some religious leaders stated they had been the victims of politically motivated prosecution for various criminal charges both tied to, and sometimes unrelated to, the practice of their religion. The government, however, said it routinely worked with religious groups to bring them into compliance with local laws.

During the year the government led an effort to bring unrecognized Christian groups together in associations that could receive government recognition en masse, requesting those groups actively support government requests, such as calls to register for elections, and not to engage in illegal practices. The government approved the operation of three coalitions of Christian churches – counting numerous smaller churches among their members – as a way to allow those churches to operate legally. Members of the religious community in partnership with the government created two organizations – the evangelical Union of Churches of the Holy Spirit in Angola and the Protestant Christian Church Coalition of Angola –to legitimize smaller, unrecognized churches as affiliates of the umbrella group. Some religious leaders, civil society members, and media outlets accused the government of trying to coerce religious groups to align themselves with the ruling party in exchange for authorization to operate freely. Many groups also stated they remained unrecognized and the rigorous requirements imposed by the 2004 law discouraged them from applying for legal authority to operate.

The government continued not to recognize any Muslim groups officially, although the government did not force mosques to close, particularly in Luanda. Some members of the Muslim community stated the high threshold for obtaining legal status, combined with the fact the majority of recognized religious organizations were Christian, indicated the government opposed recognizing non-Christian religious groups. The Bahai Faith and the Global Messianic Church remained the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered. In the past, government officials had stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution.

The government was accused of demolishing religious places of worship in the Zango municipality of Luanda. NGO sources stated that, during a planned demolition of an illegally established housing cluster in Zango in August, government soldiers demolished three Catholic churches and threatened a priest who attempted to stop them. In addition, in Curoca municipality in Cunene Province, Church leaders and media stated the government destroyed places of worship as well as cemeteries. Local human rights organizations also stated the government destroyed some places of worship under eminent domain authorities while clearing large swathes of residential communities to make way for private development. According to media sources, much of the land forcibly taken by the government belonged to indigenous pastoralists in the southern part of the country. Church leaders publicly denounced the forced evictions by developers and businesspersons.

On July 20, Vice President Manuel Vicente reportedly called for closer collaboration and cooperation between the Catholic Church and the government to promote moral values, human rights, mutual respect, democracy, and good governance. The vice president stated this during his remarks at the opening ceremony of the 17th Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar in Luanda.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations continued to criticize publicly the proliferation of smaller, unrecognized religious groups. Governmental organizations as well as some religious associations called for all new religious groups to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy representatives engaged with government officials on religious freedom issues and encouraged them to develop regulations to expand the rights of citizens to exercise their religion freely. The embassy maintained regular contact with many religious groups, including some not legally recognized by the government, as well as faith-based NGOs.