

ZAMBIA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation while prohibiting religious discrimination and providing for freedom of conscience and religion. Authorities at times disrupted prayer services to search for illegal immigrants or drugs and enforce a law regulating public gatherings. One such raid resulted in 153 arrests. Government officials enforced registration laws, banned some unregistered churches, and threatened to ban other unregistered churches. Some church groups stated President Edgar Lungu's declaration of October 18 as a day for national prayer, fasting, and reconciliation did not include appropriate leaders in the Christian community and blurred the line between church and state. Some Christian groups criticized the government's decision to build a Christian interdenominational church, arguing it inherently discriminated against non-Christian faiths and breached constitutional provisions for church-state separation.

The number of incidents of mobs attacking and killing individuals suspected of practicing witchcraft remained numerous. Victims were often elderly members of the community. For example, police reported that in March unidentified assailants shot and killed 79-year-old Amon Mweene and two others, including a six-month-old baby, in Pemba District on suspicion Mweene had practiced witchcraft. Non-Christian groups reported societal intolerance, and said they were often called "Satanists." Religious organizations worked closely to promote interfaith relations.

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials and with religious leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, including enforcement of registration laws and interfaith relations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 15 million (July 2015 estimate). According to current U.S. government estimates, 95 percent of the country is Christian: 75 percent is Protestant and 20 percent is Roman Catholic. Among Protestants, the Anglican Church, evangelical, and Pentecostal groups have the largest numbers of adherents. Nearly 2 percent of the population is Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindus, and Bahais. Approximately 1.8 percent of the population adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions (some of which include witchcraft) and small communities of Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs, or

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those who hold no religious belief. Many people combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

There are approximately 200,000 Muslims. Muslim communities are primarily concentrated in Lusaka and in the Eastern and Copperbelt Provinces and are often divided along ethnic or national lines. Many are immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired citizenship. The Somali immigrant population has increased significantly in recent years and is estimated at approximately 20,000. Almost all those of Somali origin are Muslim and the majority live in Ndola and Lusaka. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim. According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Zambia, the Bahai community consists of approximately 7,000 adherents, located primarily in Northwestern and Southern Provinces. Most Hindus, approximately 10,000 nationwide, are of South Asian descent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the country is a Christian nation, but upholds freedom of conscience and religion for all persons. It prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the right of individuals to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. It protects the freedom of individuals to change their religion or belief. It states no one shall be compelled to take an oath or perform acts contrary to his or her religious belief. The law prescribes legal recourse and penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for violations against religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the chief registrar of societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs and pay regular statutory fees. To register, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and follow laws pertaining to labor and employment practices and criminal conduct. The chief registrar's office may consult with the police and religious umbrella organizations, called "church mother bodies," to determine a group's suitability for registration. Major church mother bodies include the Zambia Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic churches), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (evangelical Protestant churches), and the Council of Churches in Zambia (mainline Protestant churches). The law allows the minister of home affairs to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure

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to pay registration fees or a finding by the minister that the group professes purposes or has taken or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of “peace, welfare, or good order.” Groups may appeal this finding. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members but has not pursued such penalties.

The constitution states religious groups have the right to establish and maintain private schools and to provide religious instruction to members of their religious communities. The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine; students may request education in their religion and may opt out of religious instruction if the school is not able to accommodate their request. Religious education after grade nine is optional, although not all schools offer it. The religious curriculum focuses on Christian teachings but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

Government Practices

Some religious groups expressed concern about law-enforcement actions by joint teams of police, immigration, and registrar of societies’ personnel. The groups said officials of these agencies interrupted some prayer services in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces in search of illegal immigrants and drugs. The groups reported the number of actions was lower than the previous year. Among these actions was an April 5 raid of a church in Lusaka during Easter celebrations, which resulted in the arrest of 153 suspected illegal immigrants.

In March the Ministry of Home Affairs warned it would ban all unregistered churches. Home Affairs spokesperson Moses Suwali said only about 1,000 churches were registered with the registrar of societies. Suwali also announced the government would continue to carry out random inspections to ensure church compliance with registration requirements. Suwali said the government had banned some churches in Lusaka’s Chibolya Township earlier in the year, due to noncompliance with registration laws.

Religious groups reported that during the year, the government carried out a study to allow broader inclusivity of diverse faiths in the religious education curriculum but had not published the findings.

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The government's Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA), in consultation with a Muslim leadership organization, decided not to reissue broadcast permits for some Muslim radio broadcasters not related to that organization, whose permits it had revoked in 2013.

In June opposition National Revolution Party leader Cosmo Mumba advocated compulsory voter registration for Jehovah's Witnesses during the scheduled national voter registration exercise. Mumba, who attributed low voter turnout to Jehovah's Witnesses' nonparticipation in politics, also asked the government to compel Witnesses to sing the national anthem as a sign of patriotism. The government did not respond to Mumba.

During his address to the National Assembly on September 18, President Lungu declared October 18 a "day of national prayer, fasting, and reconciliation." Some religious organizations expressed concern the president's declaration breached the separation of church and state and boycotted the events of the day. Reinforcing the declaration, the government ordered closures of all bars and suspended entertainment events on October 18. In addition, the president also commissioned the construction of a national church building on October 25, further attracting criticism from prominent religious groups, which argued that the state had no place building churches. The Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), one of the three church mother bodies, argued the government building a Christian church discriminated against Muslims and other non-Christian groups. Several other religious leaders expressed the same sentiment. President Lungu held a national prayer meeting on December 29, which featured only selected clergy and drew criticism from traditional Christian leaders.

In January Muslim leaders supported the Bank of Zambia's December 2014 move to establish guidelines for Islamic banking, saying it increased access to the financial system for Muslims, who sought banking options compliant with Islamic law. Muslim leaders stated the system was open to non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

While debating the proposed final draft of the new national constitution in December, parliament rejected a suggestion to move language deeming the country a Christian nation from the preamble to the bill of rights section. Both Christian and non-Christian leaders agreed that including this language in the bill of rights could lead to discrimination against non-Christian faiths, despite provisions elsewhere in the draft constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion and of

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conscience. Some religious groups also said the clause in the existing constitution's preamble stating the country was a "Christian nation" excluded them.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Suspected practitioners of witchcraft, particularly elderly members of the community, were subject to attacks and mob violence. Police reported that in March unidentified assailants shot and killed 79-year-old Amon Mweene and two others, including a six-month-old baby, in Pemba District on suspicion that Mweene had practiced witchcraft.

Police reported the arrest in June of James Silwamba, who killed his 90-year-old father, Waikunda Silwamba, on the belief the father had practiced witchcraft in Southern Province. After the attack, Southern Province traditional leaders met Provincial Minister Nathaniel Mubukwanu and police leadership to explore measures to halt violence targeting practitioners of traditional beliefs in the province. The chiefs complained that some community members associated anyone with white hair with witchcraft and subjected them to violence or death threats. The chiefs reported 40 people had been shot and killed from 2010 to June 2015 in witchcraft-related violence in Southern Province alone.

Some non-Christian communities reported being called "Satanist." Bahai community leaders expressed concern that some churches singled out Bahai practitioners as Satanists, though they noted no other abuse. Politicians also used the Satanist tag to tar political opponents, including a prominent opposition leader, who expressed viewpoints differing from the ruling party.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and religious freedom. The Zambia Interfaith Networking Group (ZINGO) brought together leaders from all major faiths and minority groups to increase interfaith cooperation and tolerance in addressing HIV and AIDS. Women's groups, such as the Zambian Women Interfaith Network, brought together Muslim and Christian women to promote mutual understanding and work toward common goals, including religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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Embassy officials frequently met with and attended meetings and events hosted by government officials to discuss topics related to religious freedom, such as enforcement of registration laws, government-run religious observance, broadcast guidelines, and interfaith relations. The embassy also met religious groups to discuss interfaith relations.