

ANGOLA 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting legally established criteria and allows the government to shutter the premises of unregistered groups. There are 81 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups. The government has not recognized any new religious groups since 2004. In March, the government detained more than two dozen religious leaders and worshippers in several towns for violating a ban prohibiting all large gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, religious organizations formed an ecumenical task force to advise the government's effort to combat COVID-19. In September, the government issued a decree stating that only legally recognized religious groups could hold services on a limited basis under continued COVID restrictions. In September, leaders from the Islamic community responded by saying these restrictions violated their constitutional rights. Subsequently, the government liberalized religious restrictions to better accommodate Islamic Friday prayers.

In June, leaders of the local branch of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) split from the Brazilian church leadership, leading to competing lawsuits and the seizure by the government of seven temples for tax fraud and other fiscal crimes, according to international media.

Throughout the year, officials from the U.S. embassy raised religious freedom issues, including the 2019 closure of places of worship, COVID-19 restrictions, long-pending registration applications, and implementation of religious freedom legislation, with government officials. Embassy officials spoke with representatives of religious groups and civil society organizations throughout the country to discuss the continuing issue of recognition of religious groups, the public split of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and the effect of COVID-19 restrictions on the ability to worship freely.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 32.5 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2014 national census, the most recent data available, approximately 41 percent of the population is 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. While the 2014 census reported there were an estimated 103,000 Muslims in the country, one leader of a Muslim organization stated there could be as many as 800,000, including an unknown number of Muslim 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 for religious reasons, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies 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 law establishes that conscientious objectors may perform civilian service as an alternative to military service.

The law requires religious groups to register to receive government recognition and allows the government to close down unregistered groups. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property and use their property to hold religious events, exempts them from paying certain property and import taxes, and authorizes a 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 signatures originate from members residing in each of the country's 18 provinces. Each signature and resident declaration must be notarized separately. The law requires religious groups to 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 its National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR) is the adjudication authority for the registration process and has an oversight role of religious activities. INAR, which is led by a religion minister, assists religious groups through the registration process and analyzes religious doctrine to ensure that it is consistent with the constitution.

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

In March, police arrested several religious leaders and worshippers for violating the government's emergency order banning large gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19. According to press reports, police detained more than two dozen individuals for organizing or participating in religious gatherings: 22 Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Bie, Huambo, Benguela, and Lunda Norte; four members of the Evangelical Congregational Church in Kwanza Sul; and one pastor from the Holy Spirit Evangelical Mission in Namibe. Several religious leaders criticized the actions of the pastors and said churches should comply with government restrictions. The head of the Angola Christian Church Council, Deolinda Teca, said that people should continue praying, but do so in strict observance of the safety measures issued by the government, and disapproved of the posture of some religious leaders, who in the first days of the state of emergency continued to hold widely attended in-person services despite the COVID-19 restrictions.

In October, the government issued a decree stating that only religious groups formally recognized by the government could resume services on a limited basis under COVID-19 measures. It also defined Saturday and Sunday as the only two days when religious services could be held. Leaders in the Islamic community protested and said the restriction on days did not account for them. The decree, updated every 30 days, was changed in November to allow for Friday prayers without specifically citing the source of the objections. In practice, the ban on unregistered religious groups holding services was not enforced, according to religious group members.

After the passage of legislation in 2019 that reduced the number of member signatures required for religious groups to register to 60,000 but introduced a requirement of 1,000 signatures from each of the country's 18 provinces and gave

the unregistered groups six months to comply, the unregistered religious groups stated that the period was too short and the notary and residential declaration requirements, which they estimated to cost approximately \$7.50 per signature, were too costly and burdensome for their congregations. In addition to the signature requirement, the large number of undocumented residents and an unreliable residential registry system also presented obstacles to registration, according to the religious group leaders. While the law states the government may shut down religious groups that do not meet the requirements, government officials informed religious leaders they would delay enforcement until the presidency published additional implementing regulations. As of year's end, religious groups that had begun the registration process but not yet been approved by the government, including Muslims and Baha'is, were allowed to hold religious services as long as they were in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions.

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

The government continued not to recognize any Muslim groups or issue any licenses to Muslim groups to practice their religion legally. Requests for official recognition submitted in 2019 by two Muslim organizations, CISA (Islamic Community of Angola) and COIA (also translated as the Islamic Community of Angola), remained pending. In the past, government officials stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution. According to COIA, there were 69 unregistered mosques in the country.

The Baha'i Faith and the Church of World Messianity remained the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered prior to the 2004 law.

During the year, the Catholic radio station Ecclesia expanded its broadcast area to 16 provinces following a 2018 presidential announcement that the government would allow the radio station to extend its signal beyond Luanda Province. Methodist, evangelical, and Tocoist (also known as Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the World) radio stations also operated in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In April, religious organizations formed an ecumenical task force to advise the government's effort to combat COVID-19. Representatives from Caritas, the

Council of Christian Churches in Angola, and the Our Lord Jesus in the World Church worked together to identify vulnerable communities and coordinate assistance with provincial government officials. The task force largely supported the government's restrictions on public assembly, urging religious organizations to comply with public health restrictions imposed due to COVID-19.

In October, a survey conducted by the independent research network Afrobarometer found that rural and other isolated populations relied more heavily on religious leaders, traditional authorities, and the military to pass on information regarding COVID-19 than other sources, including state officials.

On June 23, according to social media, a group of local pastors from IURD took control of some of the Church's 230 temples in the country after accusing the Church's Brazilian leadership of "racism and harassment," illegally transporting hard currency, and selling church property without authorization. After a series of counteraccusations, local and Brazilian church leaders filed lawsuits against each other. Beginning in August, the attorney general seized 36 IURD temples due to suspected tax fraud and money laundering. In response to a request released on Twitter from the President of Brazil for government intervention, a government spokesman said the dispute should be resolved in the judicial system rather than diplomatic channels. At year's end, all IURD temples were closed, and the court case was pending.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials communicated with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society throughout the year, including representatives of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. During the annual bilateral human rights dialogue in December, U.S. officials urged the government to address abuses by religious groups through existing legal avenues and encouraged the government to further ease registration requirements for religious groups. Embassy officials also spoke with representatives from several provinces, including Luanda, Benguela, Huila, and Cunene, as well as representatives of multiple religious groups and organizations, such as the Congregation of Christian Churches in Angola, Tocoists, the Order of Angolan Evangelical Pastors, Jesuit Refugee Services, COIA, and the Jewish group Chabad-Lubavitch. The main topics were those related to the recognition of religious groups, the IURD split, and the effect of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on religious groups.