

CABO VERDE 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion. The law provides for freedom of religion and worship and provides for equal rights in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law requires religious groups to prove they have 500 members before they may register formally as religious groups, according them certain rights and privileges. Under a concordat with the Holy See, the government grants privileges to the Roman Catholic Church not received by other groups, including recognition of the legal status of the Catholic Church and Catholic marriages under civil law. The warden of the country's largest prison stated that Islamic religious services were now available in the prison.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom and the ability to worship in prisons with government officials. Embassy representatives discussed interfaith relations with members of civil society, including religious leaders, around the country and promoted respect for religious freedom through social media.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 568,000 (July 2018 estimate). The national government's statistics indicate 77 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, and 2 percent Muslim; 1 percent does not identify with any religion. The second-largest Christian denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other Christian denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Independent Baptists, and other Pentecostal and evangelical Christian groups. There are small Baha'i and Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience, religion, and worship are inviolable and protects the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their

religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. It provides for the separation of religion and state, and it prohibits the state from imposing religious beliefs and practices on individuals. It prohibits political parties from adopting names associated with particular religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices. Under the constitution, these rights may be suspended only in a state of emergency or siege.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison. These violations may include discrimination against individuals for their expressed religion or lack thereof, violations of the freedom of and from religious education, denial of religious assistance in hospitals and prisons, denial of free speech to religious organizations, threats against places of worship, and violations of conscientious objection within the bounds of the law.

The law codifies the constitution's religious freedom provisions by providing for equal rights and guarantees for all religions in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law separates religion and state but allows the government to sign agreements with religious entities on matters of public interest. Specific sections of the law guarantee the protection of religious heritage, the right to religious education, freedom of organization of religious groups, and the free exercise of religious functions and worship.

A 2014 concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely. The concordat further recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law and the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and it specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts Church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the Church tax deductible.

The law requires all associations, whether religious or secular, to register with the Ministry of Justice. The constitution states an association may not be armed; be in violation of penal law; or promote violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship. To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Failure to register does not result in any restriction of religious practice, but registration provides additional benefits such as exemptions from national, regional, and local taxes and fees. Registered religious groups may

receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Legally registered churches and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense. Updates to the law on religions in 2014 require religious groups to obtain the notarized signatures of 500 members before they may begin any activities related to developing their presence in the country. Failure to present the required signatures prevents religious groups from completing their formal registration process and obtaining tax-exempt status and protections to property and presence in the country.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Under the concordat with the Holy See, the government continued to grant privileges to the Catholic Church that other groups did not receive, including in educational institutions, in government facilities, and in access to media. Some minority religious groups said this practice strengthened the perception that the government favored the Catholic Church as the “official religion” over other religious groups. The government continued to use Catholic Church representatives to inaugurate public buildings throughout the country. Public television transmitted religious programming paid for by the Catholic Church, most of which was of Catholic services. Other religious groups received minimal television broadcast time, reportedly because they did not request it or had no means to pay for it.

A Muslim leader stated the registration process was straightforward. At least one religious group registered in the country in 2004 struggled to retain its designation because it did not have and was unlikely to achieve a membership of 500. Its previous registration was not recognized under the 2014 law.

The director of the Central Prison of Praia stated that during the summer he implemented regular clergy visits for Muslim prisoners, which was a new development, and added that prisoners observed Ramadan in the prison. Ministry of External Relations and Communities officials stated the country was an institution-based democracy that respected freedom of religion, including in prison.

Members of minority religious groups, including members of the Church of Jesus Christ, stated they received no media coverage from state-run media for their events. According to some observers, only Catholic and large Nazarene events received media coverage.

The government coordinated its response to a severe drought through the Catholic, Nazarene, and Adventist Churches, assigning the Churches responsibilities for particular islands. The Churches delivered aid using their own resources and distributed assistance to those in need, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy representatives met with officials from the Ministry of External Relations and Communities to discuss religious freedom, including registration of a religious group and religious demography and fluidity. The Ambassador signed a letter to the Customs Administration for the release of a vehicle for a U.S.-based Baptist group active in social works in the country. Embassy leadership attended the Cabo Verdean Jewish Heritage event in November with high-ranking government officials. U.S. embassy representatives met with Catholic, Nazarene, Adventist, and other religious communities on trips around the archipelago to discuss social conditions and interfaith and religious community relations. Embassy officials spoke with civil society representatives from religious and human rights groups, as well as children's organizations, regarding religious freedom. The embassy used social media channels to broadcast its engagement with religious leaders from several different backgrounds and to publicize events linking religion and culture. Embassy personnel met and worked with U.S. and Brazilian Baptist missionaries to discuss the implications of the 500-member rule and to understand the difficulties it represents in terms of the organizations establishing themselves as registered religious groups and in protecting their investments.