

ZIMBABWE 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, in public or in private and alone or with others. Religious and civil society groups reported the government occasionally monitored public events, prayer rallies, church congregations, and religiously affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) perceived to be critical of the government. NGOs reported that some religious officials who engaged in political discourse perceived as negative toward the ZANU-PF government became targets of the security services. In June Talent Farai (T.F.) Chiwenga, founder of Apostle T.F. Chiwenga Ministries, stated state security agents attempted to kill him for insulting Vice President and then minister of defense Constantino Chiwenga. In November the government dropped subversion charges against Pastor Evan Mawarire of His Generation Church for urging citizens via social media to protest the country's deteriorating economy in January. In September the government allowed the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association to hold a series of prayer vigils for its president, Dr. Peter Magombeyi, who had gone missing, but attendees reported a heavy presence of state security personnel at the services. Multiple church organizations released public letters appealing for tolerance, national unity, peace, reconciliation, healing, and stability while calling on the government to uphold the constitution and protect citizens' political rights. In October Deputy Information Minister Energy Mutodi made remarks on social media about Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) General Secretary Kenneth Mtata, calling him a fool, a false prophet, and a demon possessed in response to Mtata's call for the government to engage with the opposition in a national dialogue.

As in previous years, some groups criticized Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community, for encouraging child marriage and prohibiting immunizations.

The U.S. embassy raised freedom of speech and human rights with government officials. The Ambassador repeatedly urged the president and cabinet ministers to allow the political opposition party Movement for Democratic Change to conduct peaceful demonstrations, including holding a national week of prayer in July. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders and faith-based organizations to discuss the role of faith communities in supporting political reconciliation and national healing. The Ambassador met with leaders from the country's main

Apostolic coalitions to encourage them to promote women's empowerment and access to health and education among their followers.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 14.5 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2015 nationwide Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the government statistics agency, 86 percent of the population is Christian, 11 percent reports no religious affiliation, less than 2 percent adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs, and less than 1 percent is Muslim. According to the survey, of the total population, 37 percent is Apostolic, 21 percent Pentecostal, 16 percent other Protestant, 7 percent Roman Catholic, and 5 percent other Christian.

While there are no reliable statistics regarding the percentage of the Christian population that is syncretic, many Christians also associate themselves with traditional practices, and religious leaders reported a continued increase in syncretism.

Most of the Muslim population lives in rural areas and some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers living in other suburban neighborhoods. There are also small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious belief and provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, in public or in private and alone or with others. It recognizes the right of prisoners to communicate with and receive visits by their chosen religious counselor. It stipulates these rights may be limited by a law during a state of emergency or by a law taking into account, among other things, the interests of defense; public safety, order, morality, or health; regional or town planning; or the general public interest. Any such law must not impose greater restrictions on these rights than is necessary to achieve the purpose of the law. Although the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association in many cases, the act itself specifies that POSA was not meant to apply to public gatherings "held exclusively for bona fide religious, educational, recreational, sporting, or charitable purposes." The Maintenance of Peace and Order (MOPO) Act, which became law in November and replaced POSA,

maintains the same exception for religious purposes. The criminal code prohibits statements that are “insulting” or “grossly provocative” and that cause offense to persons of a particular race, tribe, place of origin, color, creed, or religion, or intend to cause such offense. Individuals convicted under this law are subject to a fine, imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year, or both.

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups, as well as schools and medical facilities run by religious groups, may receive tax-exempt status. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), which generally grants these requests. To obtain tax-exempt status, a group is required to bring a letter of approval from a church umbrella organization confirming the group’s status as a religious group. Examples of approval letter-granting organizations include the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, ZCC, and the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe. ZIMRA generally grants a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on Christianity but including other religious groups with an emphasis on religious tolerance. There is no provision for opting out of religious instruction courses at the primary level. Students are able to opt out at the secondary level beginning at age 14, when they begin to choose their courses. The government does not regulate religious education in private schools but must approve employment of headmasters and teachers at those schools.

The law requires all international NGOs, including religiously affiliated NGOs, to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government defining the NGO’s activities and zones of geographic activity. The law stipulates international NGOs “shall not digress into programs that are not specified in the MOU as agreed upon by line ministries and registered by the Registrar.” Local NGOs, including faith-based NGOs, have no legal requirements to sign an MOU with the government but “shall, prior to their registration, notify the local authorities of their intended operations.” The law gives the government the right to “deregister any private voluntary organization that fails to comply with its conditions of registration.”

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

Government Practices

In June Talent Farai Chiwenga, founder of Apostle T.F. Chiwenga Ministries, stated state security agents attempted to kill him for insulting Vice President and Minister of Defense General (retired) Constantino Chiwenga. On June 12, according to T.F. Chiwenga, his wife and a bodyguard died in a car accident that occurred after security agents ran them off the road. He suffered serious injuries in the crash but survived. In the days after the country's November 2017 military-assisted transition, T.F. Chiwenga publicly stated that then general Constantino Chiwenga "was not fit to lead." In a September 2018 sermon, T.F. Chiwenga told congregants he saw "two coffins that will bring this country to a standstill," which sources said prompted many to believe he was referring to former president Mugabe and Vice President Constantino Chiwenga. The vice president publicly rebuked T.F. Chiwenga, accusing him of extortion and practicing satanism.

In January the government charged Pastor Evan Mawarire of His Generation Church with subversion for urging his followers via social media to protest the country's deteriorating economy. A court dismissed the charges in November. In 2018 Mawarire filed a lawsuit against the Zimbabwe Republic Police for unlawful arrest and detention during his participation in 2017 antigovernment protests; the lawsuit remained pending at year's end.

Civil society organizations reported the government continued to use security laws to monitor public events and prayer rallies of religious groups, but there were no reports of specific incidents or disruptions. Christian aid organizations and local NGOs focused on memorializing victims of the 1980s Gukurahundi mass killings of mainly Ndebele civilians said that security officials monitored their activities frequently throughout the year but generally did not interfere with their activities.

In February NGO Ibhethu LikaZulu, an advocacy group in Matabeleland South that organizes memorial and prayer services to commemorate victims, built a memorial for Gukurahundi victims after the government twice blocked similar efforts in 2018. The organization's Secretary General Mbolu Fuzwayo told local media that vandals destroyed the memorial a few days after its completion.

Religious activities and events remained free from POSA and MOPO restrictions, but observers stated the government continued to categorize as political some public gatherings, including religious gatherings such as prayer vigils and memorial services, perceived to be critical of the ruling party. In September the government allowed the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association to hold a series

of prayer vigils for its president, Dr. Peter Magombeyi, who had gone missing. According to media, attendees reported a heavy presence of state security personnel at the services. Magombeyi was found outside Harare on September 19 and stated plainclothes government security officers had kidnapped and tortured him.

Multiple church organizations, including the Churches Convergence on Peace, ZCC, and Catholic Bishops' Conference, released letters appealing for tolerance, national unity, peace, reconciliation, healing, and stability while calling on the government to uphold the constitution and protect citizens' political rights. Deputy Information Minister Energy Mutodi made remarks on social media in October about ZCC General Secretary Kenneth Mtata, calling him a fool, a false prophet, and a demon possessed in response to Mtata's call for the government to engage with the opposition in a national dialogue.

The legislature considered but had not yet passed a draft amendment to the Private Voluntary Organizations Act that would increase penalties for all NGOs, including faith-based NGOs, for failure to comply with registration requirements.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included nondenominational Christian prayers, as did political party gatherings. In courts and when government officials entered office, individuals often swore on the Bible.

The government continued to enforce a 2018 ban on all radio and state-run television programs advertising prophets and traditional healing. Authorities said the ban was a response to increases in fraud. Government officials stated the constitution protected freedom of worship, but the regulatory authority retained the right to protect believers from abuse. Media reports stated some church leaders welcomed the ban because false prophets sometimes used their status to rape or defraud congregants. In February a court convicted Walter Magaya, the founder of Prophetic Healing Deliverance Ministries, of fraud for falsely claiming he discovered a cure for HIV.

Churches reported working with Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services to help improve living conditions in prison facilities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, some Christian groups, such as the United Methodist Church and the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust, criticized child marriages and immunization prohibitions in some Apostolic religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The embassy raised human rights, including freedom of religion, with government officials. The Ambassador repeatedly urged the president and cabinet ministers to allow the political opposition party Movement for Democratic Change to conduct peaceful demonstrations, including holding a national week of prayer in July. The Ambassador met with leaders of the country's main Apostolic coalitions to encourage them to promote women's empowerment and access to health and education among their followers. Embassy representatives met with Catholic, evangelical, and other Protestant, Apostolic, and Muslim religious leaders and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country and the role of religious leaders in political reconciliation.