

ZIMBABWE 2016 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 continued to target public events and prayer rallies and monitored or harassed church congregations and religiously affiliated NGOs perceived to be critical of the government. A pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church was released on charges of criminal nuisance after demonstrating outside the ruling party annual conference in late 2015. He was arrested again in November for wearing the national flag without seeking permission from Zimbabwean authorities. His trial remained ongoing at year's end. Religious leaders criticized the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for instituting a national pledge in schools without proper consultations.

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed other Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging child marriage with girls as young as 14. In October several religious and civil society groups organized and hosted the Second Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Harare which focused on the importance of dialogue in fostering inclusivity and diversity for religious groups.

The U.S. embassy engaged government officials, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 14.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010-2011 nationwide Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted by the government statistic agency, 84.5 percent of the population is Christian, 13 percent reports no religious affiliation, 2 percent adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs, and less than 1 percent is Muslim. According to the DHS, of the total population, 33.5 percent is Apostolic, 18 percent Pentecostal, 15.5 percent other Protestant, 9 percent Roman Catholic, and 8 percent other Christian.

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

The Muslim population is concentrated in rural areas and in some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers living in suburban neighborhoods. There are also small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais.

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 in 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. However, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association.

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, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe. ZIMRA will generally grant a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days.

The Ministry of Education sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on

Christianity but covering other religious groups, emphasizing religious tolerance. There is no provision for opting out of the 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 approves employment of headmasters and teachers at those schools.

The law requires all international nongovernmental organizations (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 religious NGOs, are not required 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 PVO [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

According to human rights groups and media reports, Patrick Mugadza, pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church, was released from prison in January after being detained on charges of criminal nuisance. In December 2015, Mugadza was arrested for demonstrating outside the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front annual conference. He carried a sign with the message "Mr. President the people are suffering, Proverbs 21:13". On November 18, Mugadza was arrested again and charged for unlawfully and intentionally wearing or displaying the national flag over his shoulders without seeking permission from Zimbabwean authorities. Mugadza faces a 200 Zimbabwean dollar fine (\$200) or six months imprisonment if found guilty. His trial was ongoing at year's end.

There were reports the government used security laws to target public events and prayer rallies of religious groups. In December NGO Ibheshu LikaZulu attempted to hold a planned memorial and prayer service for an estimated 20,000 victims of the 1980s Gukurahundi mass killings by government forces. Police blocked the gathering by cordoning off the meeting area and positioning water cannons near the venue. Ibheshu LikaZulu filed an application at the High Court, requesting a cease order on further interference by the police. After the High Court ruled in the

NGO's favor, approximately 200 human rights defenders, political leaders, and members of the public attended the event on December 22.

There were reports from religious and civil society groups of government monitoring or harassment of church congregations and religiously affiliated NGOs and their members perceived to be critical of the government. Instances included surveillance by security officials, denial of police permission to hold public events, and investigations into whether organizations were compliant with complex registration requirements. Ibhetshu LikaZulu stated its activities were monitored with increased frequency as the January Gukurahundi memorial dates approached. A Christian aid organization said its activities were also monitored with increased frequency, particularly in areas considered strongholds of the political opposition. The organization stated district officials sometimes required a renegotiated memorandum of understanding if district officials sought more information on a particular organization's activities.

While religious activities and events continued to be exempt from POSA regulations, the government continued to categorize as political any public gathering, including religious gatherings, critical of the ruling party. In July church leaders from nine denominations and organizations released a statement condemning what they stated was the government's disregard of the constitution, selective application of the law, and failure to deal with corruption. The government reportedly became increasingly distrustful of all gatherings and activities by individuals or groups perceived as opponents of the government.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included nondenominational Christian prayers. In courts and for government officials entering office, individuals often swore on the Bible.

In May the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MPSE) introduced a national pledge to be recited daily by students. Media sources reported many citizens stated the pledge was unconstitutional because it resembles a prayer and pledges allegiance to "Almighty God." Prior to the national pledge, many public schools recited the Lord's Prayer. They also complained the MPSE did not properly consult with religious communities. In June several church leaders led a protest march in Harare, demanding the government revoke the national pledge.

In April public concerns arose over fears that the MPSE intended to halt activities by the interdenominational Christian movement Scripture Union in public schools across the country. To resolve the issue, the MPSE met with the Zimbabwe Heads

of Christian Denominations, a Christian umbrella organization. All parties agreed that Scripture Union activities, which includes facilitating voluntary student groups that read and study the Bible in schools, could continue once the Scripture Union submitted an MOU through the MPSE.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed other Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education; encouraging child marriage with girls as young as 14; and prohibiting children from receiving immunizations.

In October several religious and civil society groups organized and hosted the Second Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Harare. Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Lazarus Dokora opened the conference with a statement that underscored the importance of dialogue in fostering inclusivity and diversity. Local religious leaders from Christian and Muslims groups participated, as well as representatives from Southern Africa and Iran.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials and with Catholic, evangelical, Protestant Apostolic, and Muslim religious leaders and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.