

CABO VERDE 2017 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. 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. Muslim community leaders noted an increased ability to obtain visas for religious visitors as compared to under the previous government, but stated they did not make many requests during the year.

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 561,000 (July 2017 estimate). The national government's statistics indicate 77 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, 2 percent Muslim, and 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 (Mormons), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Bahai 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 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, 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.

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.

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

Government Practices

Under the 2014 concordat, 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. A Brazilian-owned television network *TV Record* covered the religious activities of the Universal Church. Other religious groups received minimal television broadcast time, reportedly because they did not request it or had no means to pay for it.

Muslim leaders stated the registration process was straightforward and that they were hopeful the new government, elected in 2016, would be easier to work with than the previous one. Muslim community leaders noted, Muslims requesting to visit for community strengthening and to conduct minor infrastructure projects such as refurbishment of mosques were denied entry in the past, but the change in government appeared to have reversed that tendency, although the volume of such requests was small. The director of the Central Prison of Praia stated that he had not scheduled a time for regular clergy visits for Muslim prisoners, although other religious groups had such visits. He added that Ramadan was observed in the prison. The prison director in Mindelo, the country’s second-largest prison, noted that requests for Muslim religious services access often would involve after-hours support from the prison. A Muslim leader confirmed that the community had not approached the prison for permission since the change of government. Ministry of External Relations and Communities officials stated that the country was an institution-based democracy that respected freedom of religion, including in prison.

The country officially recognized its Jewish heritage as part of the national patrimony and national culture in a resolution issued by the Council of Ministers and signed by the prime minister in July.

Members of minority religious groups, including Mormons, stated that they received no media coverage for their events. According to some observers, only Catholic and large Nazarene events received media coverage.

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 inmates' ability and freedom to practice the religion of their choosing in prisons around the country. U.S. embassy representatives met with Catholic and other religious communities on various trips around the archipelago to discuss social conditions and interfaith and religious community relations. The embassy also spoke with civil society representatives regarding religious freedom. The embassy used social media channels to raise awareness about the need to protect religious freedom.