

ZIMBABWE 2015 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. A pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church was arrested and charged with criminal nuisance after demonstrating outside the ruling party annual conference in December and was awaiting trial. On April 29, Madzibaba Ishmael, the leader of the Johanne Masowe eChishanu Apostolic religious group, was found guilty and sentenced to four years in prison for public violence. In 2014, Ishmael and several followers reportedly attacked police, journalists, and members of the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) after ACCZ President Archbishop Johannes Ndanga suspended Ishmael's group from the ACCZ for its "wayward practices." Youth affiliated with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party organized a rally outside an Anglican Church service in connection with a land dispute. The congregants reported being intimidated, but no one was injured, and authorities disbursed the crowd. Later, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) forcefully evicted the ZANU-PF youth from the 82-hectare (203-acre) church property, where the youth had started building homes.

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community in Marange, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging polygamy with young girls.

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 14.2 million (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2010-2011 nationwide Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted by the government statistic agency ZimStat, 84.5 percent of the population is Christian, including 33.5 percent Apostolic, 18 percent Pentecostal, 15.5 percent Protestant, 9 percent Roman Catholic, and 8 percent other Christian. Some religious groups estimate their percentage of the population differently.

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While there are no reliable statistics regarding the percentage of the Christian population that is syncretic, many Christians also associate themselves with traditional practices on occasion, according to the organization Religion in Zimbabwe, and religious leaders reported a continued increase in such syncretism. According to the DHS, 2 percent of the population adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs. According to the DHS, 13 percent of the population reports no religious affiliation, while less than 1 percent is Muslim. The Muslim population is concentrated in rural areas and in some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers living in upper-middle class 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 must not impose greater restrictions on these rights than is necessary to achieve the purpose of the law. 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 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 ACCZ. ZIMRA will generally grant a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days. A group is not required to be registered with the government to receive tax-exempt status.

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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 in form three, 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."

Government Practices

According to human rights groups and media reports, Patrick Mugadza, pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church, was arrested in December for demonstrating outside the ZANU-PF annual conference. He carried a sign with the message "Mr. President the people are suffering, Proverbs 21:13". Mugadza was charged with criminal nuisance for allegedly blocking pedestrian movement. Mugadza was released on \$50 bail and was awaiting trial at year's end.

On April 29, Madzibaba Ishmael, the leader of the Johanne Masowe eChishanu Apostolic religious group, was found guilty and sentenced to four years in prison for public violence. In May 2014, Ismael and others reportedly attacked ACCZ representative, the ZRP, and journalists as the ZRP escorted Johannes Ndanga, the ACCZ President Archbishop, to the shrine of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church in Budiriro, a Harare suburb. Prior to the violence, the ACCZ had temporarily suspended the Johanne Masowe eChishanu Apostolic group, reportedly for failure to fully pay council dues as well as for its "wayward practices," including reported statements by Ishmael that he was God, abuses against women and children, and preventing children from attending school.

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According to the press the attacks were a response to the suspension and the targets of the attack fled. The ZRP returned later that day, arresting group members as suspected perpetrators of the attacks on police and others, but Ishmael was not arrested until January 2. The ACCZ banned the Johanne Masowe eChishanu Apostolic group following the violence, but said it could rejoin the ACCZ if members conducted themselves according to ACCZ principles.

According to church leaders, on April 26, approximately 1,000 ZANU-PF youth gathered outside the walls of St. Mary's Anglican Church in Chitungwiza in connection with a dispute over 82 hectares (203 acres) of land owned by the church. The crowd chanted ZANU-PF songs and blocked congregants from leaving the church grounds. For their safety, the congregants said they stayed inside the church for several hours after the service ended until riot police dispersed the youth who had massed outside the church gates. There were no reports of injury. Subsequently, the High Court ruled in favor of the church and police evicted the youth from the church property, where they had started building homes. The church reported there were no further incidents regarding the land dispute.

There were reports the government used security laws to target public events and prayer rallies of religious groups. According to the NGO Ibhethshu LikaZulu, each year since 2011, police in Bulawayo have blocked the NGO's planned memorial and prayer services for an estimated 20,000 victims of the 1980s Gukurahundi mass killings by government forces, stating the services would incite violence. Attempts to hold the memorial services were blocked twice during the year. Ibhethshu LikaZulu appealed to the High Court in February and was awaiting a ruling at year's end. Police blocked several prayer rallies organized by civil society and church groups on behalf of missing human rights activist Itai Dzamara.

There were reports from religious and civil society groups of government monitoring or harassment of religiously affiliated NGOs and their members who criticized the government. Instances included surveillance of NGO events by security officials, denial of police permission to hold public events, and investigations into whether organizations were compliant with complex registration requirements.

Ibhethshu LikaZulu stated its activities were monitored with increased frequency as the January Gukurahundi memorial dates approached. A Christian aid organization said that during the parliamentary elections NGOs, including religious

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NGOs, were required to have representatives of the government's Central Intelligence Organization present at their meetings to ensure the NGOs did not engage in political dialogue.

The government reportedly began scrutinizing religious groups for activities considered to be commercial in nature, with some calling for those activities to be taxed. According to media reports, Pentecostal groups came under the most intense scrutiny.

While POSA exempts religious activities and events, the government continued to categorize as political any public gathering, including religious gatherings, critical of the ruling party.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included nondenominational Christian prayers.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community in Marange, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging polygamy with young girls.

Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist religious groups continued to build and operate primary and secondary schools. The United Methodist, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches all operated private universities. Christian schools, the majority of which were Catholic, constituted one-third of all schools. Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish groups operated primary and secondary schools in major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives raised the issue of religious freedom with government officials and met with Catholic, other Christian, and Muslim religious leaders and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.