

# **LESOTHO 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no reports of significant government actions affecting the constitutional prohibition against religious discrimination and constitutional provisions for freedom of belief and the right of individuals to practice, manifest, or change their religion. The government provided extensive support for schools operated by religious groups.

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

The U.S. government continued to discuss religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contact with religious leaders.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.9 million (July 2014 estimate). Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. The remaining 10 percent is Muslim, Hindu, or Bahai, belongs to indigenous or other religious groups, or is atheist. Many Christians practice traditional indigenous rituals in conjunction with Christianity. Muslim and Hindu numbers are declining due to emigration to South Africa. There is a small number of Jews. Muslims live primarily in the northern area of the country.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa, South Asia, and China constitute less than 1 percent of the population. No statistics are available on their religious affiliation.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the freedom to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate one's religion.

The government has no established requirements for recognition of religious groups. By law any group may register with the government, regardless of its purpose, as long as it has a constitution and a leadership committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not. The benefits

of registration are administrative and accrue to any organization that registers, whether religious or secular.

Approximately 80 percent of all primary and secondary schools are owned and operated by churches. The Roman Catholic Church, the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and, to a lesser extent, the Methodist Church are the primary operators of religious schools, which are publically funded. Since the introduction of free primary education in 2000, the education ministry has built new non-denominational schools, reducing the proportion of religiously affiliated schools. The education ministry pays and certifies all teachers at government-funded schools, including religious schools, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and religious schools. The government does not mandate religious education in schools, and the constitution exempts students at any educational institution from requirements to receive instruction or attend any ceremony or observance associated with a religion not their own. However, in practice, at any school offering religious education, which includes all religious schools and some secular schools, the subject is mandatory. All curricula, including for religious education classes, must be approved by the minister of education

### **Government Practices**

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

### **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**

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contact with religious leaders, including with representatives of the Christian Council of Lesotho, an umbrella organization of five Christian churches.