

ANGOLA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting legally established criteria and allows the government to close the premises of unregistered groups. There are 81 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups in the country. The government did not recognize any new religious groups during the year and has not done so since 2000. Ninety-seven registration applications remained pending at year's end, among them two from Muslim organizations. In January, following a year-long dispute, the government recognized new local leadership of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), which led to the expulsion of 55 Church leaders connected to its Brazilian parent church. In March, 11 IURD temples under the new leadership were permitted to open, but 340 temples remained closed pending the conclusion of investigations and court cases on charges of tax fraud and money laundering against IURD's Brazilian leadership. Some IURD Church members demonstrated against the government closure of their churches. Also in March, the government relaxed its COVID-19 preventative measures, permitting religious services to be held on any day of the week, but with some occupancy restrictions. Unlike in 2020, there were no arrests or major protests related to COVID-19 restrictions.

Throughout the year, interfaith religious organizations met to discuss religious freedom issues and to collaborate on social action projects. In August, an NGO hosted a religious freedom forum attended by interfaith leaders. The forum participants presented seven recommendations to the government, including recognition of Islam as an official religion. The government did not respond to those recommendations by year's end.

Throughout the year, officials from the U.S. embassy raised religious freedom issues with government officials at the national level, including the closure of places of worship, COVID-19 restrictions, long-pending registration applications, and implementation of religious freedom legislation. Embassy officials spoke with representatives of religious groups and civil society organizations throughout the country to discuss the continuing issue of recognition of religious groups, the IURD intradenominational split, and the effect of continued COVID-19 restrictions on the ability to worship freely. The embassy promoted religious freedom on its website and through social media platforms.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 33.6 million (midyear 2021). According to the 2014 national census approximately 41 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 38 percent Protestant. Individuals not associated with any religious group constitute 12 percent of the population. The remaining 9 percent is composed of animists, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, and other religious groups. Among Protestants, Tocoists (members of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the World) are the largest group, with 2.8 million adherents, according to the Ministry of Culture's National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR). The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) reports 500,000 members. Other major Protestant denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Baptists, and the Assembly of God Pentecostal. There is also a small number of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. INAR reports that in 2018, the most recent data available, there were 122,000 Muslims. INAR states the number has grown considerably since that time. A leader of one Muslim organization estimated there are 800,000 Muslims in the country, of whom approximately 95 percent are foreign migrants, mainly from North and West African countries. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily resident foreign nationals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination. The constitution requires the state to protect churches and religious groups as long as they comply with the law. The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship, and it recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities as long as they adhere to the law. The constitution permits conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies the government may not suspend rights related to religion even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from, and correspond with, religious counselors. The law establishes that conscientious objectors may perform civilian service as an alternative to military service.

The penal code increases the penalties for crimes committed because of religion or religious belief, including homicide, verbal or physical assault, discrimination,

persecution, defamation, and genocide. Penalties for such crimes are variable and not based on a formula. For example, the punishment for willful homicide is 14-20 years in prison, while the punishment for willful homicide carried out on the basis of religious hatred is 20-25 years in prison. Hate speech, or inciting hate by other forms of communication based on religious belief, is punishable by imprisonment between six months and six years in prison. Impeding or disturbing a religious service or a funeral also carries criminal penalties.

The law requires religious groups to register to receive government recognition and allows the government to close the premises of unregistered groups. Legal recognition gives a religious group the ability to purchase property and use its property to hold religious events, exempts it from paying certain property and import taxes, and authorizes the group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system. The law requires 60,000 member signatures from legal residents to apply for registration and requires that at least 1,000 signatures originate from members residing in each of the country's 18 provinces. Each signature and resident declaration must be notarized separately. Religious groups must also submit documents defining their organizational structure, location, methods and schedule of worship, financial resources, and planned construction projects. The law also establishes qualification requirements for clergy and requires religious doctrine to conform to the principles and rights outlined in the constitution.

The Ministry of Culture, through INAR, is the adjudication authority for the registration process and has an oversight role for religious activities. INAR assists religious groups through the registration process and analyzes religious doctrine to ensure that it is consistent with the constitution. There are 81 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups in the country. The Baha'i Faith and the World Messianic Church remained the only two non-Christian registered religious organizations. The other recognized religious groups include 50 Protestant denominations such as Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; 28 African Messianic denominations; and the Catholic Church.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system. Private schools are allowed to teach religion.

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

Government Practices

In January, the government recognized new leadership of the IURD temples separate from leaders loyal to IURD's Brazilian parent denomination. This followed a 2020 dispute between Brazilian and Angolan IURD pastors, which included allegations of tax fraud and money laundering made by Church members and pastors against the Church's Brazilian leadership. Based on those allegations, the government closed all IURD temples in 2020. In March, the government allowed 11 temples under the new leadership to reopen. As of December, INAR reported that 340 IURD temples remain closed pending conclusion of criminal investigations and court cases. In May, the government expelled 55 Brazilian Church leaders who were not members of the newly recognized local IURD denomination. During the year, leaders loyal to IURD's Brazilian denomination across the country filed multiple lawsuits in provincial courts to regain control of the denomination. The lawsuits were pending at year's end. Some IURD Church members demonstrated against the government closure of their churches.

INAR reported that the government did not officially recognize any new religious organization during the year and had not done so since 2000. Unregistered religious groups continued to state that the notary and residential declaration requirements (60,000 total signatures, including 1,000 signatures from each of the country's 18 provinces), which they estimated to cost approximately 3,300 kwanza (\$6) per signature, were too expensive and burdensome for their congregations. In addition to the signature requirement, the large number of undocumented residents and an unreliable residential registry system continued to present obstacles to registration, according to religious group leaders.

According to INAR, since registration requirements were changed in 2019, which included lowering the number of member signatures required from 100,000 to 60,000, 97 religious groups submitted applications; all were pending government approval at year's end. Among those pending, 17 groups had not yet provided the requisite 60,000 signatures but had met the other criteria for approval. While the law states the government may close the premises of religious groups that do not meet the registration requirements, government officials generally allowed groups with pending applications to hold religious services.

The government continued not to recognize any Muslim groups or issue any licenses to Muslim groups to practice their religion legally. Requests for official registration submitted in 2019 by two Muslim organizations, CISA (Islamic Community of Angola) and COIA (also translated as the Islamic Community of Angola), remained among the 97 pending applications. INAR officials said the primary reason Islamic groups had not been recognized was their lack of a single

governing body. In July, COIA leadership held a congress to form the Islamic Council of Angola (CONSIA) to satisfy this requirement but failed to gain enough participation from CISA for INAR to consider it as the single body governing all mosques in the country. In the past, government officials stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution.

The INAR director and Ministry of Culture officials continued to state concerns regarding the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which they said exploited vulnerable populations with limited financial means by requiring them to provide recurring payments or dues in order to worship or belong to these organizations.

In March, the government relaxed its COVID-19 preventative measures and allowed religious groups to meet on any day of the week instead of just on Saturday and Sunday. Gatherings for religious services were limited to 50 percent occupancy of the facility used, the same as for nonreligious gatherings. Churches and mosques generally adapted to the new restrictions; some held multiple smaller services during the day to avoid exceeding the occupancy limits. Unlike in 2020, there were no arrests or major protests related to COVID-19 restrictions.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

During the year, several religious groups, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Communication, held an ecumenical dialogue and participated in an interfaith social action initiative called Abraco Solidario (Solidarity Embrace), which provided food to vulnerable populations affected by the severe drought in the southern provinces of Cuando Cubango, Cunene, Namibe, and Huila. Participants included the Council of Christian Churches in Angola, the Evangelical Alliance, and Catholic organizations Caritas, and Justice and Peace.

Several faith-based organizations linked to the Catholic Church and the Protestant religious group Congregational Evangelical Church in Angola formed the Plataforma Sul (Southern Platform) to advocate for more efficient government and social responses to problems affecting rural communities and minority ethnic groups resulting from the widespread drought, such as food shortages.

In August, the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Friends of Angola (FOA) organized a roundtable on religious freedom in the country. Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim leaders participated, as well as representatives of other NGOs. FOA presented recommendations from the participants to President Joao Lourenco, members of the National Assembly, and INAR, all calling for

changes, such as recognition of Islam as an official religion, improved government dialogue with mosques around the country, no preferential treatment for any religious group by the government, creation of an independent body to regulate national religious affairs, and updates to the 2004 law on religious freedom. The government had not responded to the recommendations by year's end.

In addition to the Catholic radio station Ecclesia, which broadcasted in 16 provinces, other Catholic (Vatican Radio and Maria Radio), Methodist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Tocoist radio stations also operated in the country under government licenses. Several religious groups had radio shows on secular radio and TV stations, such as the Jehovah Witnesses and the IURD.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials engaged with government officials throughout the year. In meetings and communication with officials from INAR and other government agencies, embassy officials encouraged the government to further ease registration requirements for religious groups and discussed the status of religious groups pending their official recognition, the implementation of religious freedom legislation, continuing COVID-19 restrictions on places of worship, and the status of closed mosques and IURD temples.

Embassy officials also engaged with religious communities and civil society representatives throughout the year. They spoke with religious leaders and NGOs from several provinces, including Luanda, Benguela, Huila, Cuando Cubango, and Cunene, as well as with representatives of multiple religious groups and organizations such as the Congregation of Christian Churches in Angola, the IURD, the Order of Angolan Evangelical Pastors, Jesuit Refugee Services, COIA, and the Jewish group Chabad-Lubavitch. In these meetings, the main topics related to government recognition of religious groups, the IURD intradenominational split, and the effect of COVID-19 restrictions on religious groups. In August, embassy officials participated in a roundtable discussion on religious freedom organized by FOA.

The embassy promoted religious freedom on its website and through social media platforms. It used social media posts to promote the principle of religious freedom as a universal right on International Religious Freedom Day.