



Congo, Republic of

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles and a population of 3,800,600. Approximately half of its citizens are Christian; of these an estimated 90 percent are Roman Catholic. Other denominations include Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is a growing Muslim community, estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most Muslim workers in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa and Lebanon, with some also from North Africa. The West African immigrants arrived mostly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a large Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population is made up of practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs, those who belong to various messianic groups, and those who practice no religion. A small minority of Christians practice Kimbanguism, a syncretistic movement that originated in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. While retaining many elements of Christianity, Kimbanguism also recognizes its founder (Simon Kimbangu) as a prophet and incorporates African traditional beliefs, such as ancestor worship.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool region) have been associated with opposition political movements, including some elements of the armed insurrection in the southern part of the country from 1997 to 2001. While the association persists, its influence has diminished considerably since 2003.

Several foreign missionary groups are active in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no official state religion, and the Constitution specifically forbids discrimination on the basis of religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process, although all state that it is time-consuming and lengthy. Penalties for failure to register involve fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners, but no criminal penalties are applicable.

The Government recognizes the Christian holy days of Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day as national holidays. Muslim holy days are not nationally observed; however, they are respected. For example, employers grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Although uncommon, interreligious marriage was generally socially acceptable. Children of majority and minority religious groups usually sat side-by-side in school. In practice, religion was generally kept separate from public education. Religious tolerance was greater in urban areas than in rural areas. In some forest communities where there are pygmy populations, there is some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their cultural practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

A joint ecumenical council, which meets yearly in February, represents all organized religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions include highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the presidency, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly. The U.S. Embassy also has implemented programs with key civil society groups that address these issues. U.S. government funding continued to assist the local branch of CARITAS (affiliated with Catholic Relief Services and local church organizations), which implemented several grassroots projects in rural areas.

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