



# 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Botswana

Publisher	United States Department of State
Publication Date	10 August 2016
Cite as	United States Department of State, <i>2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Botswana</i> , 10 August 2016, available at: <a href="http://www.refworld.org/docid/57add89d15.html">http://www.refworld.org/docid/57add89d15.html</a> [accessed 30 November 2016]
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## Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, with certain exceptions, and protection against governmental discrimination on the basis of creed. Some groups reported difficulty securing long-term residence permits for missionaries.

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

The U.S. embassy engaged with the government at high levels on residency permits for missionaries and religious freedom generally. The embassy met leaders of each major faith and discussed interfaith collaboration and the establishment of an interfaith council.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.2 million (July 2015 estimate). According to a 2006 demographics report published by the country's Central Statistics Office, 63 percent of citizens are members of Christian groups, 27 percent claim their religion as "God," 8 percent espouse no religion, 2 percent are adherents of the traditional indigenous religion Badimo, and all other religious groups comprise less than 1 percent of the population.

Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also Lutherans, Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and members of other Christian denominations. According to a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center, there are approximately 8,000 Muslims, many of whom are of South Asian origin. There are small numbers of Hindus and Bahais. Immigrants and foreign workers are more likely to be members of non-Christian religious groups than are native-born citizens.

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

### *Legal Framework*

Under its broader protections of freedom of conscience, the constitution provides for the freedom of thought and religion, the right to change religion or belief, and the right to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The constitution permits the government to restrict these rights in the interest of protecting the rights of other persons, national defense, public safety,

public order, public morality, or public health when the restrictions are deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society." The government has never exercised this provision. The constitution also prohibits discrimination based on creed in provision of rights.

The constitution provides that every religious group may establish places for religious instruction at the group's expense. The constitution prohibits requiring religious instruction, as well as requiring participation in religious ceremonies in a religion other than one's own. The constitution also prohibits compelling an individual to take an oath that is contrary to that individual's religious beliefs.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the registrar of societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. A group must register to conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account at a local bank. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (BWP) (\$89) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered group is subject to penalties including fines up to BWP 500 (\$44) and up to three years in prison.

#### *Government Practices*

Optional religious education remained part of the curriculum in public schools; this curriculum continued to emphasize Christianity but also addressed other religious groups in the country. Government regulation of private schools did not distinguish between Christian, Muslim, or secular schools.

In March the parliament amended the law to raise the minimum membership threshold for registration for religious groups from 10 members to 250 members. As of the end of the year, the amendment had not been implemented.

Some Christian organizations reported that some of their missionaries had difficulty obtaining residence permits for missionary work. The Department of Labor and Home Affairs attributed this difficulty to a gray area in the immigration "points system," developed several years ago and implemented gradually, providing greater weight to missionary work tied to development projects than to proselytizing. Some observers, however, suggested considerations outside the points system affected the awarding of visas for specific religious groups.

Although it was common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups also occasionally led prayers.

### **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. Ambassador engaged relevant ministries at the highest level, urging greater transparency on resident permit regulations for missionaries and advocating on behalf of religious freedom generally.

The Ambassador hosted meetings with religious leaders representing each of the major faiths present in the country to discuss interfaith collaboration and the re-establishment of an interfaith council that could function in collaboration with, as well as independent of, the embassy, to promote interfaith dialogue and address religious freedom issues on an ad hoc basis.

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