

CABO VERDE 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion. The law provides for freedom of religion and worship and provides for equal rights in accordance with the constitution and international law. A concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law. The law requires religious groups to prove they have 500 members before they may register formally as such and accords registered groups certain rights and privileges.

In September, the country hosted a conference of parliamentarians and interfaith religious leaders from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that produced recommendations on religious education, the establishment of an ECOWAS charter on religious tolerance, the application of laws on religious freedom, and interfaith activity. In June, Minister of Communities Jorge Santos stressed the importance of religious pluralism in remarks at the second annual Jewish Africa Conference in Morocco. During the year, other government ministers engaged multiple denominations as partners to help implement social programs and crime reduction activities. The Ministry of Education also announced plans to report on the status of moral and religious education courses in schools.

The Catholic-affiliated School of Christian Training graduated its first class of prospective teachers with specialized training in Catholic moral and religious education.

The Ambassador underscored religious freedom as a U.S. government policy priority during meetings with religious leaders. In meetings with representatives of different denominations, U.S. Embassy officials stressed the importance of religious tolerance and encouraged interfaith engagement to promote broad support for religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 597,000 (midyear 2022). The 2021 national census figure is 505,000. According to the 2021 census, 73 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, 2 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 2 percent Nazarene, 2 percent Christian Rationalist, 1 percent Muslim, and 16 percent that do not identify with any religion. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, New Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, and other Christian groups. There are small Baha'i and Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience, religion, and worship are inviolable and protects the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. It provides for the separation of religion and state and prohibits the state from imposing religious beliefs and practices on individuals. It prohibits political parties from adopting names associated with specific religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices.

The law codifies the constitution's religious freedom provisions by providing for equal rights and guarantees for all religions in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law separates religion and state but allows the government to sign agreements with religious entities on matters of public interest. Specific sections of the law guarantee the protection of religious heritage, the right to religious education, freedom of organization of religious groups, and the free exercise of religious functions and worship. The penal code provides for punishment for discrimination on religious grounds, incitement of hatred against a religious group, planning of the destruction of a religious group or a part thereof, prevention or disturbance of religious worship through violence or the threat thereof, and destruction or desecration of a place or object of worship or religious veneration. Moreover, the law identifies religious hatred and commission of a crime due to the perceived religion of the victim as aggravating factors warranting stiffer sentences for certain crimes, including murder.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison. These crimes may include discrimination against individuals for their expressed religion or lack thereof, violence or the threat of such that impedes or disturbs the practice of religion, violations of the freedom of and from religious education, denial of religious assistance in hospitals and prisons, denial of free speech to religious organizations, threats against places of worship, and violations of conscientious objection within the bounds of the law.

A concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely in the country. The concordat further recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law and the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and it specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the church tax deductible.

The law requires all associations, whether religious or secular, to register with the Ministry of Justice. To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Registered religious groups may receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Unregistered associations may conduct the same activities to the extent permitted under the law but are not eligible for tax benefits. Legally registered churches and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense. The law requires religious groups to obtain the notarized signatures of 500 members before they may begin any activities related to developing their presence in the country. Failure to present the required signatures prevents religious groups from completing their formal registration process and obtaining tax-exempt status and protections for their property and presence in the country.

The law permits conscientious objection to mandatory military service on religious grounds. Conscientious objectors are not required to perform alternative service, and no such alternative is provided under law.

According to the law, recognized churches and religious communities or organizations may apply for and obtain authorization to provide moral and religious education in public schools. Such education is optional. By law, the government is to ensure necessary conditions to provide moral and religious education in schools without discrimination.

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

Government Practices

In September, the country hosted a five-day conference of parliamentarians and interfaith religious leaders from ECOWAS nations entitled “Religious Tolerance and Harmony: Essential Factors for the Development, Peace, and Stability of the Region.” ECOWAS led and organized the conference. The conferees recommended that member states include education on religious tolerance in school curricula, that ECOWAS establish a charter on religious tolerance, that member states budget resources to address and promote tolerance, and that member states apply relevant laws and commit to increased interreligious activity within their countries. A representative of the Ministry of Culture and other speakers portrayed what they stated was the country’s record of interfaith harmony as an example for the region and the world to follow.

During the second annual Jewish Africa Conference, which took place in Morocco in June, Minister of Communities Jorge Santos received a Jewish leadership award on behalf of the country in recognition of its commitment to honoring Jewish heritage. Santos stressed the significance of Jewish heritage and underscored the importance of religious pluralism in society in his remarks at the opening session.

Also in June, Minister of Family, Inclusion, and Social Development Fernando Elisio Freire met with leaders of multiple Christian denominations on the island of Sao Vicente to involve religious institutions more deeply as partners in the implementation of social programs that fight poverty, support families, and reduce crime. Freire announced the government would allow religious and other

organizations to use 89 commercially designated spaces in social housing projects throughout the country for day care centers, training centers, preschools, and afterschool care facilities for children.

Minister of Justice Joana Rosa met with representatives of the local Catholic and Nazarene churches in April and May to seek their support for government efforts to reduce crime and recidivism rates and their assistance in reintegrating former prisoners into society through church-sponsored vocational training programs.

In September, the Ministry of Education initiated a campaign to recruit teachers to provide Catholic moral and religious education courses in schools. In April, Minister of Education Amadeu Cruz announced plans to produce a report on the implementation of moral and religious education in schools since courses on this subject were introduced in 2019, noting the ministry's ongoing dialogue with the Catholic Church on the issue.

According to the office of Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and Parliamentary Affairs Filomena Goncalves, the government adopted new procedures to facilitate engagement with religious denominations. In July, the government held a national forum on the islands of Santiago and Sao Vicente to promote partnership with the country's religious entities to address community challenges such as drug abuse. In August, Goncalves represented the country at the Universal Peace Federation World Summit 2022 and the Leadership Conference in South Korea. In October, she represented the country at the 29th annual International Law and Religion Symposium at Brigham Young University.

Government-funded rehabilitation work on the 19th-century Catholic Church of Santa Catarina on the island of Santiago concluded in November. The work was part of a broader government-sponsored effort to preserve 24 houses of worship that were historically and culturally significant throughout the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Catholic-affiliated School of Christian Training graduated its first class of prospective teachers with specialized training in Catholic moral and religious education. More than 40 students on two islands completed the two-year course intended to prepare them to teach in public and religious schools. In November,

the Catholic University School opened and began offering graduate programs in higher education instruction, religious education, and social doctrine.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador underscored religious freedom as a U.S. government policy priority during meetings with Baptist and other religious leaders. In meetings with representatives of different religious groups, U.S. Embassy officials stressed the importance of religious tolerance, solicited views on the state of religious freedom in the country, and encouraged interfaith engagement to promote broad support for religious freedom.