



Zimbabwe

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws contributed to generally free practice of religion.

The Government arrested, harassed, and prevented church attendance by Anglican clergy and parishioners from the Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA). The Government also harassed religious leaders who were critical of government policies, who spoke out against human rights abuses committed by the Government, and who provided humanitarian assistance to citizens during a nearly three-month ban on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

There were continuing reports of tensions between indigenous religious groups and mainstream Christian churches.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150,760 square miles and an estimated population of nine million. Between 70 and 80 percent of the population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist; there are also a significant number of independent churches. While the country is overwhelmingly Christian, the majority of the population also believes, to varying degrees, in indigenous religions. Religious leaders reported a continued increase in adherence to indigenous religious practices.

Muslims account for 1 percent of the population, primarily in rural areas where Muslim-led humanitarian efforts are often organized. The remainder of the population includes practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, and exclusively indigenous religions. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is.

While political elites tend to be associated with one of the established Christian churches, there is no correlation between membership in any religious group and political or ethnic affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion as well as to privately or publicly manifest and propagate their religion through worship, teaching, practice, and observance.

The Government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays.

A July 2006 amendment to the Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) criminalizes any practice "commonly associated with witchcraft," but only if that practice is intended to cause harm. Spoken words alone are not considered a witchcraft practice or evidence of illegal activity. The amendment also criminalizes witch hunts, imposes criminal penalties for falsely accusing others of witchcraft, and rejects killing of a witch as a defense for murder. Attacks on individuals in witchcraft-related cases appear to be prosecuted under laws for assault, murder, or other crimes. In practice, the Government did not detain or prosecute persons for allegedly practicing witchcraft.

The Public Order and Security Act of 2002 (POSA) restricts freedoms of assembly, expression, and association. Although not specifically aimed at religious activities, the Government invokes the act to interfere with religious and civil society groups organizing public prayer rallies. While POSA exempts religious activities and events, influential persons in the Government view any public gathering that is critical of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party as political even if the nature of the event is religious.

The Government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious organizations that operate schools or medical facilities are required to register those specific institutions with the appropriate ministry regulating their activities. Religious institutions are allowed to apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department. These requests are generally granted.

The Ministry of Education sets curriculums for public primary and secondary schools. Many public secondary schools include a religious education course that focuses on Christian religious groups and covers other religious groups, emphasizing the need for religious tolerance. Most public universities offer degrees in religious education that primarily focus on Christian doctrine.

The country has a long history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist primary and secondary schools. The Government does not regulate religious education in private schools but does play a role in approving employment of headmasters and teachers. Since independence, there has been a proliferation of evangelical basic education schools. Christian schools, the majority of which are Catholic, constitute one-third of all schools. Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish primary and secondary schools are also in major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government viewed with suspicion missionaries it considered politically motivated. Some missionary organizations occasionally experienced significant delays implementing humanitarian relief activities and in having their work permits issued. During the ban on NGOs between June and August 2008, police officers and ZANU-PF party and government officials harassed church members when they attempted to distribute food, clothing, and other humanitarian assistance.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government arrested, harassed, and prevented church attendance by Anglican clergy and parishioners from the CPCA, the regional body of the Anglican Communion. Police continued to disrupt Anglican church services and strike worshippers, primarily women, with batons. They arrested parishioners, interrogated priests and lay leaders, and locked the doors of churches to keep worshippers away.

The Government continued to favor Nolbert Kunonga, the ZANU-PF-affiliated, former Anglican bishop of Harare, who formed the Church of the Province of Zimbabwe (CPZ) in 2007.

On May 21, 2009, after a disruption at an Anglican church in Kuwadzana, police accused the priest of stoning a police officer. During a weekly women's prayer meeting at the church, a Kunonga-affiliated priest had entered the

church with a dog and told the women to leave. The Anglican priest then confronted the Kunonga priest and asked him to leave. The man returned with plain-clothed "neighborhood police" who beat up the priest at the church. The women attempted to stop the violence and then were themselves restrained by reinforcements of riot police. The Anglican priest was arrested and held in custody for several days until he was released on bail. The priest's trial for assaulting a police officer began on June 15 and was in progress at the end of the reporting period.

On March 29, 2009, approximately 25 riot police prevented parishioners from entering the St. Francis' Anglican Church in the Glen Norah suburb of Harare. When the crowd did not disperse, police beat some church members with batons; police also beat a local councilor who attempted to peacefully resolve the situation. When the priest refused to dismiss the 400-500 parishioners from the church lawn, he and three others were arrested for disturbing the peace. As police attempted to disperse the crowd, they threw tear gas and fired live ammunition into the air, ostensibly as a warning. However, one bullet struck a man in a house adjacent to the church, piercing his hand. The following day, the priest was further charged with inciting violence as a result of the gunshot wound. The court case began on June 16 and was underway at the end of the reporting period.

On March 22, 2009, police arrested five members of the CPCA on criminal charges of malicious injury to property. The charges stemmed from a disturbance at an Anglican church in the Harare suburb of Tafara. When Kunonga supporters barred CPCA women from entering the church to conduct prayers, the CPCA women forced their way through the gate, causing it to fall off the hinges. During the scuffle, several church windows were broken as well. The Kunonga supporters called the police who arrested five CPCA parishioners whom they accused of breaking the windows and gate. The trial began on June 22 and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On March 16, 2009, the priest at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in the Glenview neighborhood of Harare led parishioners to the church to hold a service. When police refused to let the parishioners enter the church, the priest led a service under a tree outside the church. Police attempted to disperse the group by throwing an estimated 20 tear gas canisters. The tear gas entered homes near the church, affecting residents. The priest and his followers refused to leave and spent nine hours sitting in the yard praying.

On February 13, 2009, the CPCA filed a contempt of court case against the commissioner of police, Augustine Chihuri, and the Minister of Home Affairs for their role in ordering police to intervene on behalf of Kunonga. On April 7, 2009, the co-Ministers of Home Affairs directed Kunonga and Reverend Sebastian Bakare -- the new Anglican bishop of Harare appointed by the CPCA -- to observe an interim court order that allowed both groups to share church buildings and worship spaces. The co-ministers also directed police to stop interfering with church services. A court hearing took place on June 29, 2009, to resolve the dispute over church assets. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In February 2009 three women parishioners from the Anglican church in Dzivarasekwa were summoned to court on charges of stealing an electrical cable belonging to a priest affiliated with Kunonga. On February 24, 2009, after a Kunonga-affiliated priest had locked church doors in Dzivarasekwa on January 13, February 10, and February 24 to prevent CPCA members from attending church, CPCA members advised the local police that Kunonga's priest was violating the church sharing arrangement. When the police refused to intervene, CPCA-affiliated women forced their way into the church. The Kunonga-affiliated priest subsequently filed a report alleging the CPCA members stole electrical cable. The women stood trial on June 23 and their case was in progress at the end of the reporting period.

CPZ priests and bishops forcibly asserted control of Anglican schools within the Harare province of the CPCA, sometimes with police assistance. On January 27, 2009, CPZ priests and police forcibly removed the headmaster, deputy headmaster, and bursar from a high school in Mashonaland East. As of June 2009 the CPZ members maintained control of the school. Community members protested the takeover and reported that the new headmaster and bursar are taking the students' school fees and using them to purchase personal vehicles. Kunonga

loyalists have also blocked Anglicans from performing burials at the Anglican cemetery in Chitungwiza.

On August 17, 2008, police ordered the priest to terminate an Anglican church service in Kuwadzana. When he refused, police arrested the church rector and members of the church executive council. They were held for two days and released without charge.

After Nolbert Kunonga created the CPZ, the CPCA excommunicated him from the Anglican Communion. Police began disrupting Anglican services and detaining parishioners in January 2008 after the CPCA appointed Reverend Bakare. Police and Kunonga supporters prevented Bakare from conducting services in several churches and harassed Bakare supporters.

In August 2007 police detained 15 Christian church leaders for several hours for attending an allegedly unsanctioned meeting. Several members of the group were arrested again two days later and held for four days before being released without charge.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were continuing reports of tensions between indigenous religious groups and mainstream Christian churches, particularly on issues of polygamy, modern medicine, and political exclusion. However, religious leaders from a wide spectrum of groups continued to discuss these matters productively in interfaith council meetings.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government, religious groups, and NGOs as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials expressed concern about the intimidation and harassment of religious officials who criticized the Government.