

# NAMIBIA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of belief and the right to practice, profess, and promote any religion. In July nine South African Muslims were deported from the southern part of the country for allegedly engaging in “religious work” without having been admitted into the country with the proper visa. Namibian Islamic Judicial Council (NIJC) head Sheikh Desmond Dawid Tjipanga opposed the deportation stating that it was an act of discrimination against Muslims. Some religious groups complained about the difficulty in obtaining visas for foreign coreligionists to enter the country.

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

U.S. embassy officials engaged with religious groups and leaders to discuss religious freedom.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.4 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 97 percent of the population identifies as Christian. According to church statistics and the government’s 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, approximately 50 percent identify as Lutheran and 20 percent as Catholic. Other groups, including Anglican, various Reformed denominations, Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, evangelicals, charismatics, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), make up the remaining 27 percent of the population that is Christian. The number of Pentecostal and charismatic churches is growing. Some Zionist churches combine Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Muslims, Bahais, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and other non-Christians together constitute approximately 3 percent of the population and reside primarily in urban areas.

Many members of the Himba and San ethnic groups combine indigenous religious beliefs with Christianity. Muslims are mostly Sunni and are predominantly immigrants from elsewhere in Africa, South Asia, or recent converts.

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

### Legal Framework

The constitution specifies the country is a secular state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief, as well as the right to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain, and promote any religion. These rights may be subject to “reasonable restrictions” justified by interests such as “the sovereignty and integrity of Namibia, national security, public order, decency or morality.”

The law allows recognition of any religious group as a voluntary association, without the need to register with the government. A voluntary association is required to have a written constitution stating its purpose, be membership-based, be a legal person, and have a plan for disposing of its assets if it ceases operation. Religious groups may also register as nonprofit organizations (an “association without gain”) with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Under the law, a nonprofit organization must have a minimum of seven members and two directors, an auditor, and a registered address in the country, and must comply with all regulations of domestic corporate law. Both religious groups registered as nonprofit organizations and religious groups formed as voluntary associations are exempt from paying taxes. Other faith-based organizations may also register as welfare organizations with the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS). Under MoHSS regulations, a welfare organization must have a minimum of seven members, an auditor, and a constitution. If the group meets the objectives of a welfare organization, the MoHSS will issue a letter of certification. There is no difference in the application process between religious and nonreligious groups. A welfare organization may apply to the Department of Inland Revenue to receive tax-exempt status. Once registered as a welfare organization, a religious group may seek to obtain communal land at a reduced rate, which is at the discretion of traditional authorities or town councils, based on whether they believe the organization’s use of the land will benefit the community.

The constitution permits religious groups to establish private schools provided no student is denied admission based on creed. The government school curriculum contains a nonsectarian “religious and moral education” component that includes education on moral principles and human rights and introduces students to a variety of African traditions and religions, as well as world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Bahai Faith, and Rastafarianism.

Similar to other foreigners seeking to work in the country, religious workers must obtain an appropriate visa. Work visa requirements include proof of educational qualifications, police clearance certificate from country of origin, and – for visas over three months – proof of a contract.

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

### **Government Practices**

In July the government deported nine South African Muslims from the southern part of the country for allegedly engaging in “religious work” without a proper visa. The individuals entered the country with tourist visas, but the government stated they intended to engage in proselytizing and religious work among Namibian Muslim groups; they were reportedly performing daily prayers at a mosque in the Keetmanshoop area when they were arrested. According to media sources, NIJC head Sheikh Desmond Dawid Tjipanga said he suspected the group was placed under surveillance by police and officials from the Department of Immigration when the individuals entered the country. The Keetmanshoop area of the Immigration Directorate confirmed to media that the South Africans were deported but did not give a reason. Tjipanga opposed the deportation stating that it was an act of discrimination against Muslims.

Some religious groups complained about difficulty in obtaining work visas for foreign coreligionists and religious workers to enter the country to engage in religious activities. The government, however, also strictly enforced work visa requirements for nonreligious, nontourist foreign visitors.

The government periodically included religious leaders in discussions regarding issues affecting the country and in national events. President Hage Geingob held consultations with leaders from major religious groups in the country, including from various Christian denominations and from the Muslim community, to discuss opportunities for collaboration in fighting poverty.

The University of Namibia and the Namibia University of Science and Technology in Windhoek, both government-supported institutions, provided rooms to religious groups and students to use for prayer and meetings.

### **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**

U.S. embassy representatives met with religious leaders from the Christian, Bahai, and Muslim communities to better understand the country's religious landscape and any potential issues of discrimination such as difficulties in obtaining visas.