



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **93.6%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **4.1%**
- Muslims : **2.1%**
- Others : **0.2%**

11,553,000

27,834 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of Burundi of 2005^[1] guarantees the right to freedom of expression, religion, thought, conscience and opinion (article 31), as well as the right to freedom of assembly and association and the right to create organisations according to the law (article 32).

The legal framework concerning matters of religious freedom is based on the same laws that govern non-profit associations (registration and operations), specifying that all religious groups must register at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and submit their statutes and a list with the names and curriculum vitae of the members of their board of governors. Once they receive approval from the ministry, they are free to carry out their activities.

Separation of Church and state is upheld in Burundi. All religious denominations are respected and are treated equally. The country's citizens have the right to convert to the religion of their choice without any restrictions. All religious groups have the right to engage in preaching, religious education, teaching in schools and running hospitals, as well as access to media including radio, television, newspapers and other journals. The state also guarantees the freedom to build places of worship.

Burundi is predominantly Christian. There is a Muslim minority, mostly Sunnis, who are concentrated in urban areas.

Incidents

During the period under review, Burundi continued to suffer from a political and social crisis that broke out in mid-2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third time in the presidential election of June of that year. At the

time, the Catholic Church – most notably the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi – joined many other voices from the political opposition and civil society to oppose Nkurunziza’s move, which was seen as unconstitutional. In response, a number of high-ranking officials within the government and the ruling CNDD-FDD party^[2] sharply criticised the Catholic bishops. However, after June 2016, no further verbal attacks against the Church were recorded.

Burundi’s different religious denominations enjoy a high degree of freedom of worship.

Several members of the clergy have privately indicated that Catholic bishops have shown greater restraint with regard to public statements on political matters. The clergy say this helps explain why there have been no major obstacles to religious activities held in the country.^[3]

At the time of writing, a former chaplain at the University of Burundi and two other priests, who fled the country in April 2015, had yet to return to the country. The three fled after receiving anonymous death threats accusing them of supporting an insurgency against the government. In 2015, the chaplain had reportedly provided moral support to about 600 university students and helped them find temporary shelter.

President Pierre Nkurunziza and some of his closest aides are very active members of a born-again Pentecostal Church. Other government members belong to other religious denominations such as the Catholic Church and Islam. Several sources consulted in Burundi indicated that they saw no cases of discrimination on religious grounds with respect to public service employment.

The Muslim minority fully enjoys the right to freedom of worship. Many mosques have been built throughout the country, particularly in the last decade. Co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims is reported to be good.

Prospects for freedom of religion

During the reporting period, the prospects for religious freedom in Burundi appear to have improved. Given the absence of serious religious freedom violations and the ease with which religious groups can worship and carry out charitable activities, it can be concluded that the exercise of this basic human right improved during the period under review and that this trend is likely to continue.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Burundi’s Constitution of 2005, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burundi_2005.pdf (accessed 8 February 2018).

[2] CNDD–FDD: Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ‘Burundi’, Report on International Religious Freedom for 2016, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 8 February 2018).