



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **92.3%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **6.4%**
- Others : **1.3%**

2,160,000

30,355 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Christians constitute the largest religious community in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In terms of state policy, there are “no established requirements for recognition of religious groups... Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not.”^[1]

Christian Churches are very active in the field of education; they operate around 80 percent of the country’s schools^[2] Instructors in these schools, however, are paid by the state, which also sets the standard curriculum.

The sponsors of denominational schools are mainly the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Lesotho Evangelical Church. Some schools are also run by the Methodist Church. Lesotho introduced free elementary education in the year 2000. A number of new state schools have been built, in some cases replacing denominational schools. However, the vast majority of schools are still in Church hands.

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy; the head of state is King Letsie III. The country’s 1993 constitution guarantees its citizens fundamental human rights and freedoms (Article 4), including freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination, irrespective of the person’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion.^[3] Article 13 is devoted to individual freedom of conscience and explicitly states that these protections “includ[e] freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” The freedom of assembly, which also applies to religious meetings, is set out in detail in Article 16.

The human rights organisation Freedom House classifies Lesotho as a “free” country^[4]

Incidents

During the current reporting period, parliamentary elections were held on 3rd June 2017. The Catholic Church of Lesotho worked hard to ensure that the elections were conducted democratically. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference, in cooperation with the Inter-Regional Meeting of Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) stated: "The election was peaceful and well organised. Although some aspects could be improved, as the local Church we applaud the manner in which the election was held."^[5]

There were no particular institutional changes or other events of note that would have had an effect on freedom of religion.^[6] In this liberal climate, the Catholic Church in Lesotho is free to work unimpeded to deepen the faith of its followers.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world and the country is repeatedly affected by drought!^[7] Wherever poverty prevails, religiously motivated tensions are often not far away. In this regard, it is not certain that good relations among religions will remain stable under increasing pressure.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Lesotho', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 2nd April 2018).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Constitution of Lesotho, World International Property Organisation (WIPO), http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=216171, (accessed 12th April 2018).

[4] 'Lesotho', Freedom in the World 2016, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lesotho>, (Accessed 2nd April 2018).

[5] 'Parliamentary elections: applause from local Church observers', Agenzia Fides, 13th June 2017, http://www.fides.org/en/news/62454-AFRICA_LESOTHO_Parliamentary_elections_applause_from_local_Church_observers, (accessed 11th February 2018).

[6] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[7] Munzinger Archiv 2018, op. cit.