



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **58.2%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **39.1%**
- Muslims : **2.1%**
- Others : **0.6%**

24,916,000

587,295 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 1 of the 2010 constitution^[1] states that Madagascar is a secular state. Under Article 2, the concept of state neutrality towards all religions is presented as the basis of the separation between state and religion. No government official can be part of the management of a religious body. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by Articles 6 and 10.

The state requires religious groups to formally register with the Ministry of Interior. Tax exemption for religious groups can be requested in case of foreign donations.^[2] According to Madagascan law, in order to be legally registered as religious entity, groups must have at least a hundred members and an elected council with a maximum of nine members, all of them Madagascan citizens. There are about 283 officially registered religious groups.

As indicated in Aid to the Church in Need’s 2016 Religious Freedom Report, the nationality code prevents children born from Malagasy mothers and foreign fathers from obtaining citizenship. The issue of stateless children from mixed marriages continues to affect Muslim families. Around six percent of the country’s Muslims are technically stateless because of this.^[3]

On several occasions government representatives – especially President Hery Rajao- narimampiapina^[4] and Prime Minister Mahafaly Olivier Solofonandrasana^[5] – have been accused of failing to uphold the secular nature of the state by using religious events for political purposes.

Incidents

In 2016, there was a clear increase in the number of attacks against Christian churches and parishes as well as religious

personnel. Local sources stress that such incidents are particularly shocking since Madagascans traditionally respect all religious leaders. At one point, the Prime Minister spoke of “a plot against the Church and the State”^[6]

Religious property has been attacked. For example, in the last two years there was a surprising surge in theft of church bells. The motive seems to be the great economic value of the bells' metal^[7] however, a Church source^[8] said that in some cases it has been part of a surreptitious attempt to curb Church activities, adding that certain groups have paid local criminals to deliver the stolen Church bells to them. This situation appears to have improved since mid-2017 and no more incidents have been reported as of time of writing.

There have been several reports about Turkey's involvement in the largescale arrival of foreign Muslims^[9] Some reports indicate an increase in the number of supporters of Wahhabi Islam in the country^[10] Incentives have been offered to those who convert, including financial assistance and education (including both Qur'anic classes and university studies).^[11] Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are suspected of playing a significant role in the spread of Islam^[12]

On 20th September 2016, 10 Pakistani imams were expelled for visa violations^[13] The imams were investigated following large-scale Eid celebrations that included the sacrifice of 200 zebus, which led the government to suspect that foreign funds had been used.

On 12th November 2016, Brother Prestome, a 43-year-old member of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart in Ankaboka, Sakaraha district, was kidnapped. The attack was carried out by three armed men and occurred while the whole religious community was gathered. The attackers apparently targeted Brother Prestome because of his albinism^[14]

A couple of days later, he was released. On 1st April 2017, five Sisters were raped when bandits attacked Notre Dame de la Salette convent in Antsirabe. The attackers also stole money and valuables^[15]

On 22nd April 2017, armed bandits attacked Ambendrana Antsohihy Parish, killing Father Lucien Njiva, a Capuchin priest and injuring a deacon who was with him. Apparently, their intention was to steal the bell from the church^[16] Subsequently two ex-gendarmes were arrested in connection with the incident^[17]

On 25th April 2017, the Minister of Education closed down 16 Qur'anic schools across the country. The establishments offered religious classes for five hours a week, exceeding the governmental limit of one hour^[18] The country's Muslim communities reacted very angrily to the move, labelling it “a declaration of war”^[19] and accusing the Minister of Education of being “Islamophobic”.^[20]

Prospects for freedom of religion

Madagascar appears to be a battleground for certain religious groups looking to win converts. In one unusual case, a group of 121 people converted to Judaism in a mass ceremony^[21] The issue of radicalism and its potential risks, as well as the increased presence of foreign Muslims – mainly in the south-east of the country – will be one of the issues needing to be closely monitored in the years to come.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Madagascar's Constitution of 2010, [constituteproject.org](https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Madagascar_2010.pdf?lang=en), https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Madagascar_2010.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 26th March 2018).

[2] Cf. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, “Madagascar”, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 26th March 2018).

[3] Ibid.

[4] The president made a controversial speech in the form of a sermon during the celebration of 500 years of

Reformation. See Ny Aina Rahaga, “La laïcité de l’Etat encore une fois foulée au pied”, Madagascar-Tribune.com, 18th December 2017, <http://www.madagascar-tribune.com/La-laicite-de-l-Etat-en-core-une,23501.html>, (accessed 13 March 2018); A. R. “Hery Rajaonarimampianina: dans la cathedrale ...”, La Gazette de la Grande Ile, 3rd January 2018, <http://www.lagazette-madagascar.com/2018/01/03/hery-rajaonarimampianina-cathedrale/>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[5] The prime minister, who is a Seventh-day Adventist, came to receive the communion during a high mass celebrated by Cardinal Parolin on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Madagascar and the Holy See. Catholics were horrified to see the Prime Minister taking the host with his hand and placing it in a side pocket. See “Quelle laïcité, à Madagascar?”, Madagascar-Tribune.com, 7th February 2017, <http://www.madagascar-tribune.com/Quelle-lai>

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[6] Garry Fabrice Ranaivoson, “Antsohihy, Mahafaly dénonce un complot contre l’État e l’église”, L’Express de Madagascar, 25th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/antsohihy-mahafaly-de-nonce-un-complot-contre-letat-et-leglise/>, (13th March 2018).

[7] An anonymous source mentions “monetary rewards” by certain groups offered to local criminal bands for each stolen bell. On the topic of theft of church bells: Seth Andriamarohasina, “Vols contre l’église– Une quarantaine de cloches dérobés”, L’Express de Madagascar, 12th July 2016, <http://www.lexpres-smada.com/blog/actualites/vols-contre-leglise-une-quarantaine-de-clochers-derobes/>, (accessed 14th March 2018); “Cloches d’églises portant l’insigne RF et vieille marmite: Un business très lucratif incitant au vol”, La Chasse-Info (without date), <http://lachasse-info.com/accueil/fiche/cloches-deglises-portant-linsigne-rf-et-vieille-marmite-un-business-tres-lucratif-incitant-au-vol>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[8] According to a Christian missionary with more than 15 years of experience in the country, the number of bell thefts runs in to the hundreds. In his diocese alone (in the north of the country), he reported at least 50 cases during the first part of 2016.

[9] Martin Mateso, “Madagascar, ‘terre fertile’ pour l’Islam radical”, Géopolis Afrique, 27th September 2016, <http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr/madagascar-terre-fertile-pour-l-islam-radical-119777>, (accessed 25th March 2018).

[10] Cf. Boubakar Nguema, “Madagascar menacé par le Wahhabisme et la radicalisation”, Actualité Houssenia Writing, 2nd July 2016, <https://actualite.housseniawriting.com/madagascar/2016/07/02/madagascar-menace-par-le-wahhabisme-et-la-radicalisation/16554/>, (15th March 2018).

[11] Boubakar Nguema, op. cit.; Renaud Girard, “Madagascar, Islamists exploit poverty to gain converts in Christian land”, Worldcrunch, 13th December 2017, <https://www.worldcrunch.com/world-affairs/madagascar-islamists-exploit-poverty-to-gain-converts-in-christian-land>, (accessed 25th March 2018).

[12] Cf. Martin Mateso, op. cit.

[13] A. R., “Ministère de l’Intérieur: Dix imams étrangers expulsés!”, Mouvement de Citoyens Magalasy de Paris, 20th September 2016, <https://mcmparis.wordpress.com/2016/09/20/20-septembre-2016-dix-i-mams-pakistanais-expulses-de-madagascar/>, (accessed 25th March 2018).

[14] Mparany, “Attaque contre des albinos: un religieux kidnappé à Sakaraha”, NewsMada, 15th November 2016, <http://www.newsmada.com/2016/11/15/attaque-contre-des-albinos-un-religieux-kidnappe-a-sakaraha/>, (accessed 26th March 2018).

[15] Andy Manase, "Viols de religieuses – Vingt-six arrestations à Antsirabe", L'Express de Madagascar, 5th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/viols-dereligieuses-vingt-six-arrestations-a-antsirabe/>, (13th March 2018).

[16] Mparany, "Attaque à main armée à Antsohiy: un prêtre tué et un diacre blessé", NewsMada, 24th April 2017, <http://www.newsmada.com/2017/04/24/attaque-a-main-armee-a-antsohiy-un-petre-tue-et-un-diacre-blesse/>, (13th March 2018); Andy Manase, "Vol de cloche – Un prêtre et un diacre abattus à Antsohiy", L'Express de Madagascar, 24th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/vol-de-cloche-un-petre-et-un-diacre-abattus-a-antsohiy/>, (13th March 2018).

[17] Andy Manase, "Antsohiy – Deux gendarmes arrêtés", L'Express de Madagascar, 28th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/antsohiy-deux-gendarmes-arretes/>, (13th March 2018).

[18] Miangaly Ralitera, "Éducation – Seize écoles coraniques à fermer", L'Express de Madagascar, 25th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/education-seize-ecoles-coraniques-a-fermer/>, (13th March 2018).

[19] Ibid, "Éducation – Les Musulmans parlent de déclaration de guerre", L'Express de Madagascar, 29th April 2017, <http://www.lexpressmada.com/blog/actualites/education-les-musulmans-parlent-de-de-cla{205e30cafce628a4751a22837988810acf465315153389d4d77589a79c0fec57}c2{205e30cafce628a4751a22837988810acf465315153389d4d77589a79c0fec57}>, (13th March 2018).

[20] Yvan Andriamanga, "Paul Rabary accusé d'islamophobe par les musulmans de Mahajanga", Madagascar-Tribune.com, 29th April 2017, <http://www.madagascar-tribune.com/Paul-Rabary-accuse-d-islamophobe,22991.html>, (13th March 2018).

[21] Josefin Dolsten, "In Madagascar, 'world's newest Jewish community' seeks roots", Times of Israel, 7th December 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-madagascar-worlds-newest-jewish-community-seeks-roots/>, (accessed 26th April 2018).