



Republic of Congo

Stable / Unchanged

Religion	Population	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Christians : 89.5% ○ Ethnoreligionists : 5.2% ○ Agnostics : 3% ○ Muslims : 1.2% ○ Others : 1.1% 	4,741,000	342,000 Km ²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Congo adopted a new constitution on 6th November 2015. Article 1 sets out the secular character of the state. Under article 8, all kinds of discrimination, including discrimination on religious grounds, are forbidden. Article 24 provides that freedom of conscience and freedom of belief are guaranteed. The same article states that “the use of religion for political goals is prohibited”, and that “any kind of religious fanaticism shall be punished”^[1]

All religious groups must register and receive approval from the government. There were no reports of discrimination against any religious group which attempted to register, although there were some complaints that the process was time-consuming. Failure to register may result in a fine, the group’s property being confiscated, its contracts with third parties being cancelled and its expatriate personnel being deported.

The Republic of Congo has a Muslim minority which has grown steadily over the last few years. Many of them are migrant workers from West African countries. Since 2014, there has also been an influx of several thousand Muslims from the Central African Republic who have come as refugees.

Individuals are banned from wearing the full-face Islamic veil (including the niqab and the burqa) in public places according to a decree which carries the force of law. This decree also prevents Muslims from foreign countries from spending the night in mosques. The Government states that these measures guard against terrorist acts^[2]

Public schools do not include religion education as a subject in their curricula. However, private schools are free to provide religious instruction.

The government often facilitates the use of public buildings for both Christian and Muslim religious ceremonies. For instance, in August 2017, an Evangelical church held a conference in the grounds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

inside the Parliament building in Brazzaville.

The following religious festivals are public holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints and Christmas. Muslim religious festivals are not national holidays, but Muslims are given leave to celebrate their main festivals, such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Kebir.

Incidents

A joint report by the UN and the Congolese government stated that a government-led security operation on 5th April 2017 caused serious damage to a Pentecostal Church in Soumouna, a village in the southern Pool region. The church is run by Pastor Ntumi (Frederic Bintsamou), whose followers believe he has mystical powers. It was alleged that he was commander of the “Ninja/Nsiloulou” rebel group which was in conflict with the government during the 1997-2003 civil war. The government claimed that Pastor Ntumi and former militia were behind 4th April 2017 raids on military, police and local government offices in Brazzaville. Six weeks later, a decree was issued by the Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation which banned the activities of Pastor Ntumi’s church claiming the church was harbouring armed militia and represented a major security threat.^[3] On 22nd December 2017 Pastor Ntumi’s followers signed a peace accord with the government.

During the period under review, there were no reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against any community because of their religious affiliation. Generally, religious groups were free to carry out their acts of public worship and other activities without any hindrance. Across the country, there is peaceful co-existence between people of different denominations.^[4]

Prospects for freedom of religion

The Republic of Congo seems likely to continue upholding the right to religious freedom during the next few years. Although tensions between Christians and the growing Muslim minority are sometimes reported, particularly in Pointe-Noire, so far these reports indicate that frictions between people from different origins can be managed without any serious incidents. Respect for religious freedom, including that of religious minorities, is likely to continue.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Congo-Brazzaville, Constitution 2015, Digithèque MJP, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/100814/121082/F1693068911/COG-100814.pdf>, (accessed on 1st May 2018).

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

[3] ‘Congo-Brazzaville: un cessez-le-feu dans le Pool, et des questions’, RFI Afrique, 24th December 2017. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20171223-congo-brazzaville-accord-paix-pool-pasteur-ntumi-questions>, (accessed 1st May 2018).

[4] Interview with a priest from the Republic of Congo on 20th February 2018.