



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **55.6%**
- Muslims : **31.5%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **11.2%**
- Others : **1.7%**

55,155,000

947,303 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Amendments to the constitution of Tanzania are under consideration but had not passed into law at the time of writing. Therefore, the 1977 constitution (with its previous amendments) remains in force. Article 19 of that constitution states that “every person has the right to the freedom of thought or conscience, belief or faith, and choice in matters of religion, including the freedom to change his religion or faith”.<sup>[1]</sup>

The new draft constitution contains further specifics about the extent of – and limitations on – the right to freedom of religion. In particular, the new article 41 contains detailed provisions including the following: (i) every person has the right to freedom of conscience and faith; (ii) every person has the right to celebrate and propagate freely their religion so long as it does not trespass the law of the country; (iii) the task of organising religious communities is outside the competence of the government; (iv) the protection of the right to freedom of worship shall be regulated by the law; (v) the state shall ban any misuse of the freedom of worship for purposes of disrupting the country’s peace, spreading hatred or stirring social confusion; (vi) faith and religion shall never be used to foster hostility or division among citizens.<sup>[2]</sup>

The constitution of Zanzibar – which since 1964 has been a part of the United Republic of Tanzania, but which is self-governing, with its own president and parliament – contains the same guarantees of religious freedom as the version of the constitution of Tanzania still in force.

All religious organisations are required to register with the Home Affairs Ministry on mainland Tanzania and with the General Register Office on Zanzibar. For registration, the names of at least 10 members are required, together with written statutes, CVs of the leaders and a letter of recommendation from the prefect of their district of origin. In addition, Muslim organisations are required to produce proof of authorisation from the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (Bakwata), or a similar authorisation from the local mufti if they are based on Zanzibar.

The Zanzibar government appoints a mufti, a professional jurist who interprets Shari'a (Islamic law), to oversee Muslim organisations. Some Muslims have argued that this practice represents excessive government interference.

The teaching of religion in state schools is permitted, but only as an extra-curricular subject. Lessons must be approved by the school management or teachers' associations and by the parents, and are offered free of charge by parents or other volunteers. Religious schools and universities are legal, and there are many of them, whether Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) or Islamic. Christian organisations are required to present the Interior Ministry with a letter of accreditation from the hierarchy of their own denomination.

The recognised national religious festivals include the Christian feasts of Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas Day, and the Muslim feasts of Maulid, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

## Incidents

Tanzania has a long tradition of peaceful coexistence between different religious denominations, particularly between Christians and Muslims, and freedom of religion is generally respected. Religion is generally not seen as a factor of disunity, and recent conflicts and social tensions are typically seen as being caused by disputes among political parties<sup>[3]</sup>

On 25th December 2017 Pastor Zachary Kakobe, who leads a Pentecostal church in the commercial capital Dar es Salaam, delivered a Christmas sermon in which he stated that Tanzania was "quietly turning into a one-party state by systematically banning political activity". Days later, the Home Affairs Ministry warned religious organisations which commented on political issues that they could have their licence revoked<sup>[4]</sup>

A similar case took place in July 2016, when Bishop Gwajima of the Pentecostal Glory of Christ Tanzania Church in Dar es Salaam, was arrested and questioned by the Police after the cleric spoke from the pulpit criticising the country's ruling party. The police released the bishop after a few hours, but his church's license was suspended pending further investigation.

In September 2016, three suspects were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for an arson attack in 2015 on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the western Kagera Region.<sup>[5]</sup>

During the past few years, Christians in Tanzania – and, to a lesser extent, moderate Muslims – have been increasingly concerned about incidents of Islamist violence. In contrast with previous years, during the reporting period no serious incidents of attacks by Islamist radical elements against Christian institutions were reported.

## Prospects for freedom of religion

Tanzania's long-standing tradition of respect for the right to religious freedom and of religious coexistence has continued, despite some attempts by extremist groups to spread a violent version of Islam in recent years. The activities of those groups have diminished during the last two years. Other incidents, such as judicial actions taken against Pentecostal pastors, seem to have had political motives. Therefore, we can conclude that respect for the right to religious freedom has improved in Tanzania during the period under review and that the prospects are positive.

## | Endnotes / Sources

[1] The United Republic of Tanzania. Judiciary, <http://www.judiciary.go.tz/downloads/constitution.pdf>, (accessed on 1st May 2018).

[2] The provisions of the new constitution concerning the freedom of religion have been provided by an expatriate missionary who is knowledgeable with Swahili. The new Constitution, in its original Swahili language, uses the word “dini” to refer to faith, religion denomination, sects or to refer to the followers of any religious group. In Swahili, “dini” means what we may call “religions of the book”, and does not include traditional religious beliefs.

[3] Conversation, on 23rd March 2018, with an expatriate missionary with 18 years of experience in Tanzania.

[4] ‘Tanzania threatens to shut Churches after Magufuli criticism’, BBC World Service, 29 December 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42517535>, (accessed on 1st May 2018)

[5] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ‘Tanzania’, 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 on 1st May 2018).