



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **84.4%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **2.2%**
- Muslims : **11.8%**
- Others : **0.1%**

40,323,000

241,550 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 29 (c) of the Ugandan constitution gives Ugandans the “freedom to practise any religion and manifest such practice, which shall include the right to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organisation in a manner consistent with this constitution”.^[1]

The Religious Affairs Department of the Directorate for Ethics and Integrity (under the Office of the President) proposed a draft bill in mid-2017 that would expand the department’s vetting powers and allow it to regulate existing religious groups more broadly. The bill was aimed at the alleged lack of transparency of, and disharmony among, various faith-based groups.^[2] It was also intended to stop corrupt and fraudulent practices carried out mainly by rogue clerics. Many “born-again” Churches claimed that the draft was an attack on freedom of worship, while other leaders and the Interreligious Council of Uganda welcomed the new legislation. At the time of writing, the bill had not yet passed into law.

In an unprecedented move, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) issued an order in April 2017 banning all kinds of street preaching, especially where the preacher uses loudspeakers.^[3] Those guilty of an offence under the order are liable to a fine of 40,000 shillings (EUR€10, US\$11), two months of imprisonment or both. Some Christian groups saw this decision as an attack against Christianity. Other observers noted that the KCCA had no authority to make such a move without the prior approval of Parliament.^[4]

More recently, some Christian Churches have been embroiled in a controversy over how much their religious activities are contributing to sound pollution in urban centres, because of the use of powerful sound systems to broadcast preaching, songs and services.^[5] This controversy may have been inspired by the actions of the Rwandan government, which closed down 700 churches in February 2017 because of the same problem.^[6]

In March 2018, the governmental Uganda Communications Commission revoked the licences of 23 radio stations, accusing them of “promoting witchcraft”. It was stated that the radio stations used witch doctors and sorcerers to attract listeners. Some journalists demanded that the same kind of measure should be taken against stations which host fake pastors or fraudulent clergy.^[7]

The main Christian and Muslim holy days are statutory holidays.

Incidents

On 29th June 2016 the Ugandan Christian University decided to ban all non-Anglican forms of worship on its campus^[8]

On 26th November 2016 Sheikh Mohammed Kiggundu (who was also a Major in the military) was gunned down along with his bodyguard in a Kampala suburb. At least a dozen Muslim leaders have been killed by unidentified perpetrators since 2012.^[9]

Some of the killings of Muslim religious leaders seem to be related to internal struggles between rival Muslim factions. Police have linked the murders to rebel group Allied Democratic Forces in the east of the country^[10] Sometimes, ideological differences^[11] and disputes about real estate appear to have provoked the killings.^[12]

Towards the end of December 2016, following an investigation, anti-terrorism units raided the Nakasero mosque (the headquarters of the Tabliq group), confiscated materials and made some arrests. Days later, a similar raid took place on another mosque in Kiwatule (east Uganda) and further arrests were made. All those arrested were released after several days.^[13]

On 19th January 2017 some born-again evangelists were beaten by a crowd that accused them of propagating a false prophecy during a three-day crusade in Karira Sub-County (Budaka District)^[14]

Prospects for freedom of religion

In general, the situation seems to be a little more stable than during the previous reporting period, despite disputes within the Islamic community and murders of Muslim leaders. The situation of religious freedom in the country is not expected to change significantly in the foreseeable future.

Endnotes / Sources

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[2] David Lumu, “Proposed legislation to regulate worship divides religious leaders”, The Observer, 29th June 2017, <http://observer.ug/lifestyle/53046-proposed-legislation-to-regulate-worship-divides-religious-leaders.html>, (accessed 11th April 2018); “IRCU hosts State minister for Ethics and Integrity”, Interreligious Council of Uganda www.ircu.or.ug, 20th April 2017, <https://ircu.or.ug/news/ircu-hosts-state-minister-for-ethics-and-integrity/>, (accessed 11th April 2018).

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