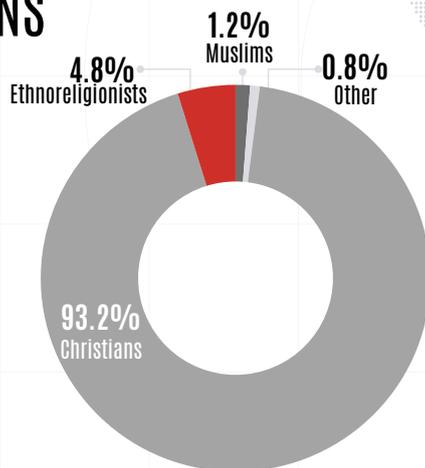




# ANGOLA

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of Angola upholds the principle of separation between religion and state, and requires that religious denominations must be respected. Article 10 (section 2) states that “The State shall recognise and respect the different religious faiths, which shall be free to organise and exercise their activities, provided that they abide by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Angola.”<sup>1</sup> The state also guarantees protection to “churches and faiths and their places and objects of worship, provided that they do not threaten the Constitution and public order” (Article 10, section 3). Article 41 also provides for freedom of conscience, religion and worship, and recognises the right to conscientious objection.

All religious groups apply for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. One of the requirements needed to become officially recognised is having a membership of at least 100,000 people and be present in at least 12 of the country’s 18 provinces.<sup>2</sup> Religious groups must present a minimum of 60,000 signatures of believers to be registered as official religious organisations (Angola’s National Assembly recently reduced the minimum number of signatures from 100,000).<sup>3</sup> This policy has resulted in the de facto denial of official rec-

ognition to some religious minority groups, including Muslims, and some small Evangelical Churches, which can, however, perform public acts of worship.<sup>4</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief criticised the law, arguing that it was discriminatory against religious minorities.<sup>5</sup> Only officially registered groups are entitled to have their own schools and places of worship.

Concerning religion in public schools, religious education is not part of Angola’s public educational curriculum. However, private schools can teach religion.<sup>6</sup> Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas Day are public holidays. Non-Christian festivities are not recognised as public holidays.

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the reported period, Angolan Muslims continued to complain about the conditions in which they exercise their right to freedom of religion. In January 2019, Mohammed Saleh Jabu, head of Islamic Religious Guidance/Irshad and Cooperation in Angola, told Turkey’s state-run press agency Anadolu that even though Muslims “are free to exercise their religion [ . . . ] the government has yet to recognise Islam as one of the official religions of the state, and that should change.”<sup>7</sup> Mr Saleh also confirmed that Angola’s Muslim

community is in the process of collecting the required 60,000 signatures needed to “legalise” Islam.

In October 2018, the government passed a joint executive decree mandating that all unregistered religious groups “submit within 30 days individual requests for recognition or cease operations”.<sup>8</sup> The Minister of Culture, Carolina Cerqueira, said that the registration requirement is meant to “act against unregistered bodies which are a threat to human rights and against the principles of urban life and positive coexistence.”<sup>9</sup> The measure is part of a campaign to combat crime called “Operation Rescue” where, according to the government, churches were closed for allegedly “hosting criminal activity and not complying with zoning laws meant to protect the health and safety of citizens”.<sup>10</sup>

The Muslim community, not yet registered as an official religious group, protested that several mosques were shut down under the aforementioned registration law.<sup>11</sup>

The NGO International Christian Concern noted that the law has also “led to the closure of over 2,000 churches with another 1,000 expected to close,”<sup>12</sup> a situation also reported by Human Rights Watch<sup>13</sup> and the World Watch Monitor.<sup>14</sup> The government has not recognised any further religious groups

since the legislation was approved. On 1st December 2019, the Order of Evangelical Pastors of Angola (OPEA) organised a protest against the closure of churches, saying the police acted violently against them and arbitrarily detained some of its members.<sup>15</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The first two years in power of President João Lourenço have been viewed with optimism by many, including human rights organisations and the business sector. Regarding the right to religious freedom, there are signs that the situation of Islam in Angola is likely to improve in the upcoming years, as indicated by members of the Muslim community. “As a result of the current political reforms in Angola, Muslims are witnessing better relations with the state and society,” said David Alberto Ja, head of the Islamic Community of Angola.<sup>16</sup> Angolan Muslims are likely to comply with all the requirements to become an official religion recognised by the state. Such a recognition would legitimise and strengthen the presence of Islam in the country. A concern expressed by other religious and civil society groups is that the government, through its campaign to shut down unlicensed religious groups, is trying to coerce these same groups into supporting the ruling party.<sup>17</sup>

## SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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