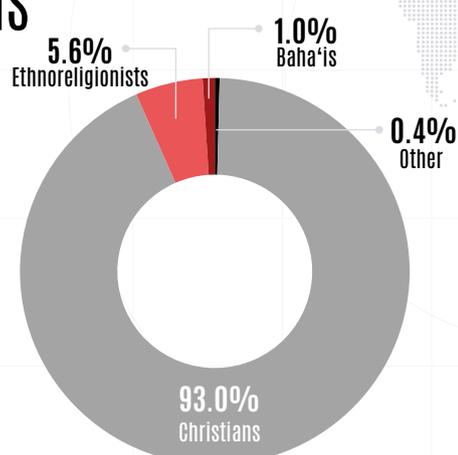




# LESOTHO

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Christians constitute the largest religious community (90%) in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In terms of state policy, there are “no established requirements for recognition of religious groups [...]. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not.”<sup>1</sup> Those who do register are exempt from income tax.

About 83 per cent of Lesotho’s primary schools and 66 per cent of its secondary schools are owned and run by Churches.<sup>2</sup> The constitution allows students to opt out of religious classes, but so far none have done so.<sup>3</sup>

Teachers are paid by the state, which also sets the standard curriculum. Article 13 (Section 3) of Lesotho’s constitution states that no student is “required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony” without their consent.<sup>4</sup>

The sponsors of denominational schools are mainly the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Lesotho Evangelical Church. The Anglican Church is the third largest denomination in the country. Some schools are also

run by the Methodist Church. Lesotho introduced free elementary education in 2000. A number of new state schools have been built, in some cases replacing denominational schools. However, the vast majority of schools are still in the hands of Churches.

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy; the head of state is King Letsie III. The country’s 1993 constitution (revised in 2018) guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms (Article 4, Section 1), including freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination, irrespective of the person’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion.<sup>5</sup> Article 13 (section 1) is devoted to individual freedom of conscience and explicitly states that these protections include “freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” Freedom of association, which also applies to religious meetings, is described in detail in Article 16.

The Catholic Church helped found the Basutoland National Party (now called the Basotho National Party) in 1959, whilst the Basutoland Congress Party is aligned with the

Protestant Church.<sup>6</sup>

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Some members of the Anglican clergy have been unhappy with Bishop Adam Mallane Taaso, head of the Diocese of Lesotho, over his involvement in politics. The latest incident dates back to December 2018 when the Bishop gave an award to MoAfrika FM, a Maseru-based radio station.<sup>7</sup> However, one clergyman, Rev. Maieane Khaketla, had already written in 2015 to Archbishop Thabo Cecil Makgoba of Cape Town, primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, to complain about the issue.<sup>8</sup>

Except for the above, there were no particular institutional changes or major events that have hindered freedom

of religion. In the country's liberal climate, the religious groups are free to work unimpeded to deepen the faith of their members.

## PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

No violations of religious freedom have been reported in the country in recent years. Nevertheless, Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world and has been affected by periodic drought.<sup>9</sup> Wherever poverty prevails, religiously motivated tensions are often not far away. In this regard, it is not certain that good relations among religions will continue, especially if social pressures increase.

## SOURCES / ENDNOTES

1 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Lesotho," Report on International Religious Freedom for 2018, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/lesotho/> (accessed 21st February 2020).

2 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Lesotho," op. cit.

3 Ibid.

4 Lesotho 1993 (rev. 2018), Constitute Project, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lesotho\\_2018?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lesotho_2018?lang=en) (accessed 21st August 2020).

5 Ibid.

6 James N. Amanze, "Christianity and politics in Southern Africa 1960-2013, in Companion to Christianity in Africa, edited by Elias Kifon Bongmba, New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. pp. 393–394, [https://books.google.ca/books?id=9pZACwAAQBAJ&pg=PA393&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=9pZACwAAQBAJ&pg=PA393&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 21st August 2020).

7 Itumeleng Khoete, "Unholy fight rocks Anglican Church", The Post, 7th December 2018 <https://www.thepost.co.ls/news/unholy-fight-rocks-anglican-church/> (accessed 21st February 2020).

8 Ibid.

9 Central Intelligence Agency, "Lesotho," The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lt.html#field-anchor-people-and-society-population-distribution> accessed 30th August 2020); "Lesotho: Tens of thousands 'one step away from famine' as drought impacts harvests and UN launches flash appeal," UN News, 20th December 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1054081> (accessed 30th August 2020)