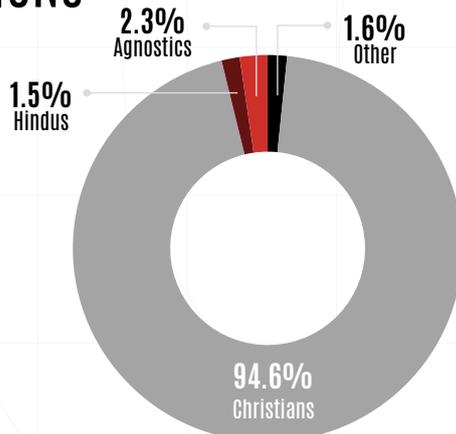




# SEYCHELLES

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, to the north-east of Madagascar.

Article 27 (1) of its Constitution<sup>1</sup> guarantees the right to the “equal protection of the law [...] without discrimination on any ground except as is necessary in a democratic society”. Every person has the right to freedom of thought and religion.

Article 21 (1) recognises the right to change religion, as well as the right, “either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate the religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance”.

However, pursuant to Article 21 (2, a and b), this may be subject to limitations, if they are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of “defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the rights or freedoms of other persons”.

Article 21 (4-6) of the Constitution prohibits any legislation which provides for the establishment of any religion or the

imposition of any religious observance. The profession of any particular religion or belief is not a necessary condition for assuming public office. No one shall be compelled to take an oath contrary to their belief or religion.

Seychelles’ population is mainly Christian and within this faith group, the Catholic Church is by far the largest denomination (over 75 percent)<sup>2</sup> followed by Anglicans, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Christian groups. There are small numbers of Hindus, Muslims, Baha’is and other non-Christian groups.<sup>3</sup>

By law, all religious groups must be registered, either as corporations or as associations. Registration as associations is done at the Registrar General’s Office in Victoria, with few formalities.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Baha’is, and the Islamic Society of Seychelles have been constituted as corporations by means of separate legislative acts.<sup>5</sup> There are no penalties for failure to register, but registration is necessary in order to benefit from certain social entitlements. For example, it is not possible to broadcast religious programmes on state media without registration.<sup>6</sup>

Article 21 (3) of the Constitution further states that no one attending a “place of education” shall be forced to receive religious instruction or take part in any religious ceremony

or observance. However, Article 21 (7) does not “preclude any religious community or denomination from providing religious instruction for persons of that community or denomination in the course of any education provided by that community or denomination.” Both Catholics and Anglicans provide religious instruction during regular school hours.<sup>7</sup>

The Catholic Diocese of Victoria has been working with the Ministry of Education towards opening the first Catholic private school in modern times, in 2020.<sup>8</sup> Any child of any religious background will be eligible to attend the school.

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of expression, the government controls much of the country’s media,<sup>9</sup> and there are certain limitations on such freedom when it comes to religious broadcasting.

Religious organisations may publish newspapers,<sup>10</sup> but under the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act 2000 (as consolidated), they cannot be granted broadcasting licences. Instead, the government provides airtime on a pro rata basis, depending on the size of the religious organisation’s membership.<sup>11</sup> Live religious broadcasting is prohibited with the exception of radio broadcasts of Catholic Masses and Anglican services. This has led some smaller groups to complain that they are not afforded their own broadcast time. Nevertheless, 15-minute pre-recorded prayer slots have been made available to registered religious groups.<sup>12</sup>

The country’s public holidays reflect the Catholic majority of the population. They include the feasts of Corpus Christi, the Assumption, All Saints and the Immaculate Conception, together with Christmas, Easter, New Year’s Day and Labour Day. Hindus also celebrate the officially recognised Taippoosam Kavadi Festival holiday, an “assertion of Hindu identity in the multi-racial and multi-cultural Seychelles”.<sup>13</sup>

Churches and other religious groups function without government interference and feel at liberty to raise matters of concern to them in public and to criticise the government. The Churches have been strong advocates of democracy and human rights in the country.

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the period under review, there were no significant incidents or developments related to religious freedom.

## PROSPECTS RELIGIOUS FOR FREEDOM

Freedom of religion is protected and observed in the Seychelles and the prospects for the future of this right remain positive. Generally, no restrictions have been imposed on religious groups, and tax-free status is granted by the government for registered religious groups. One area of concern, however, is the law prohibiting religious groups from obtaining radio or television licenses.<sup>14</sup>

## SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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- 3 “Republic of Seychelles: Population and Housing Census 2010 Report,” National Bureau Of Statistics 2012, National Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.nbs.gov.sc/downloads/population-and-housing-census-2010-report/viewdocument> (accessed 2nd October 2020).
- 4 Office of International Religious Freedom, “Seychelles,” 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/seychelles/> (accessed 8nd December 2020).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 “Broadcasting And Telecommunication Act,” Laws of Seychelles, Seychelles Legal Information Institute, <https://seylit.org/sc/legislation/consolidated-act/19> (accessed 2nd October 2020).
- 7 Office of International Religious Freedom, op. cit.
- 8 Sharon Ernesta, “Seychelles to Get Private School in 2020 with Emphasis on Moral, Spiritual Values,” Seychelles News Agency, 22th July 2017 <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/7604/Seychelles-to-get-private-school-in-2020-with-emphasis-on-moral-spiritual-values> (accessed 24th October 2020).
- 9 “Seychelles profile - Media,” BBC News, 29th August 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094089> (accessed 8nd December 2020).
- 10 Office of International Religious Freedom, op. cit.
- 11 “Broadcasting and Telecommunication Act,” op. cit.
- 12 Office of International Religious Freedom, op. cit.
- 13 Vijaratnam Śivasupramaniam, “Taippoosam Kavadi Festival In Seychelles”, Murugan Bhakti: The Skanda Kumāra Site, <http://www.murugan.org/research/seychelles.htm> (accessed 2nd October 2020).
- 14 Office of International Religious Freedom, op. cit.