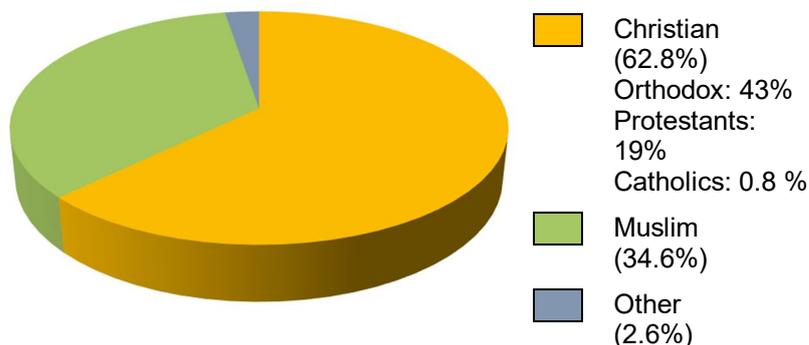


ETHIOPIA



Area: 1,104,300 km ²	Population: 96.5 million	Political system: Autocracy ¹	Major Language(s): Amharic
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Legal framework of freedom of religion and actual application

The 1993 Constitution of Ethiopia enshrines, in article 11, the principle of separation between the state and religion. It further adds that no religion shall be considered as official. The constitution goes on to state that the state and religious groups shall not meddle in each other's affairs. Article 27 acknowledges the freedom of conscience and religion of all its citizens, including the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. It also certifies the right to disseminate one's own beliefs and to convert to another faith, and the right of parents to educate their children in the religion which they practice.²

The Preamble of the Constitution states that the "equal development of the various cultures and religions" is one of the indispensable conditions which "guarantee a lasting peace, a flourishing and irreversible democracy and a rapid economic and social development for our country Ethiopia".

The constitution also prohibits religious teaching in all schools, both public and private. Article 90, section 2 states: "Education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religious influence, political partisanship or cultural prejudices." Religious instruction is permitted in churches and mosques.

The law prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion.

Under a law introduced in February 2009 – the Charities and Societies Proclamation – all Churches and religious groups are considered as "charity organizations", and as such are required to submit a request for registration with the justice ministry. They are required to renew this application every three years. In the absence of such registration, they cannot engage in such activities as opening a bank account nor can they be represented legally. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) are exempt from this three-yearly renewal process. The Church and other agencies specializing in charitable and development work are required to register with the Charities and Societies Agency separately from the religious body to which they belong, and are thereby subject to current legislation on the NGOs. There is a limit of 10 percent on funding received from abroad.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which is the largest single religious group, is predominant particularly in the Tigray and Amhara regions and in some parts of Oromia. Meanwhile the Sunni Muslims, who represent approximately a third of all Ethiopians, are dominant in the Oromia, Somali

and Afar regions. The Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians represent around nine percent of all Ethiopians and are most strongly represented in the south-west.³

A law of 2008 makes it a criminal offence to incite religious hostility by means of the media, as well as blasphemy and the defamation of religious personalities. Various government and civil society initiatives seek to promote harmonious coexistence between the religions and to prevent and resolve conflict related to religion. This government initiative has given rise to a “National Interfaith Peace Council”, which works together with the regional governments to foster religious co-existence.

The government does not grant permanent visas to foreign religious workers, unless they are involved in development projects managed by registered NGOs affiliated to the church to which the foreign missionary belongs. This policy is not normally applied in the case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The government officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holidays and mandates a two-hour lunch break on Fridays to allow Muslims to go to a mosque for prayers. Official holidays include: Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Meskel, Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr.

Incidents

Muslims and Pentecostal Protestants have complained of alleged local injustices and discrimination in the allocation of loans for the construction of buildings for religious use. The Protestants claim discriminatory treatment by local authorities, both Muslim and Ethiopian Orthodox, in regard to requests for land for the building of churches and cemeteries. The Muslims have complained of the difficulties they experience in gaining permits to build mosques in the northern regions of Ethiopia, where the population is overwhelmingly Ethiopian Orthodox and where the Muslim community represents a small percentage of the population. They also complain that their foreign imams are generally granted very limited residence permits, a policy which the government is said to pursue in order to exert a tight control over the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.⁴

Following the murder of 30 Christian Ethiopian migrant workers by militants of the Islamic State in Libya in mid-April 2015, a mass demonstration took place in the capital, Addis Ababa, on Wednesday, 22nd April, which turned violent. Addressing a rally staged in Addis Ababa, which was attended by hundreds and thousands of the City’s dwellers, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn said the “killing is intend to create division among Ethiopians”. However, he added: “Ethiopia’s long history of religious tolerance will not be hampered by this evil act.” Representatives of various religious institutions also decried the killing of the Ethiopians as a callous terrorist attack targeted at innocent civilians. They noted that terrorism doesn’t represent any religion and that an ISIS attack against Ethiopian Christians will not affect the centuries-old tradition of religious tolerance in Ethiopia.⁵

On 3rd August 2015, a court in Ethiopia sentenced 18 Muslims, including clerics and a journalist, to up to 22 years in prison under the Anti-Terror Proclamation legislation. The 18 were convicted in July 2015 on charges including terrorism and conspiracy to create an Islamic state.⁶ They had been arrested in 2012 over protests against alleged government interference in religious affairs, when a section of Ethiopia’s Muslim community staged protests over allegations that the government was interfering in the choice of the main religious body, the Islamic Supreme Council. Four of the defendants – Abubakar Ahmed, Ahmedin Jebel, Yasin Nuru and Kemal Shemsu – were sentenced to 22 years each in prison. The other 14 received sentences ranging from seven years to 18 years. The group denied the charges and said they were mistreated during their detention.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Concerning the right to religious freedom, during the reporting period the situation has remained stable and no incidents of particular concern have been reported. Religious denominations, generally, can carry out their activities without any significant restrictions, although some minority groups complained of what they perceived as a discriminatory treatment. The cases of detention of

Islamic militants and the control that the State exerts on Muslim communities seem to be motivated by legitimate security concerns rather than by a will to curtail religious activities.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index

² http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ethiopian_Constitution.html

³ G. Prunier & Elio Ficquet. Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia. Hurst & Company. London. Nairobi 2015

⁴ Interview with a Catholic expatriate missionary in Addis Ababa

⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/anti-isil-rally-turns-violent-ethiopia-150422151713828.html>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33759946>