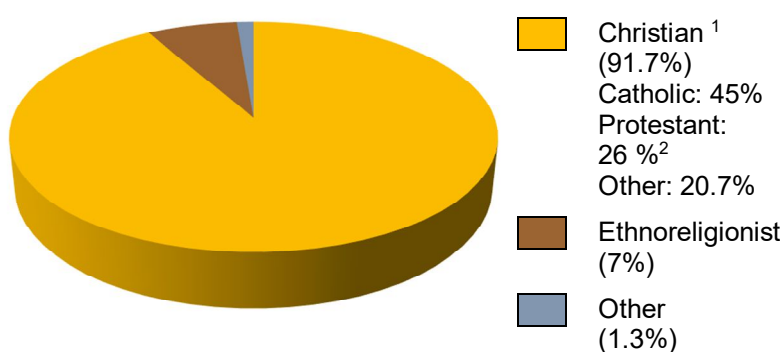


LESOTHO



Area: 30,355 km ²	Population³: 1.95 million	Political system: Monarchy	Major Language(s): Sesotho, English, Zulu, Xhosa ⁴
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Legal Framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

About half of Christians in Lesotho – by far the largest religious group in this country – are Catholics. Other Christian groups include the Lesotho Evangelical Church and various other Protestant, Pentecostal and independent African Churches, among them Father Masango St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission, which is also present in South Africa. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha’i and members of traditional indigenous religions make up the remaining 10 percent.

In regard to religious practice however, the boundaries between the different religions are frequently somewhat fluid. Thus Christians may also follow traditional African rites and customs. The government has “no established requirements for recognition of religious groups. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not.”⁵

The Christian Churches are very active in the field of education and are responsible for running about 80 percent of the schools in the country.⁶ The teachers however are paid by the state, which also sets the standard curriculum.

The majority of the religious schools are owned and run by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Lesotho Evangelical Church and to some extent the Methodist Church. However, in the year 2000 the state introduced free primary education and has built a number of non-denominational schools which in some cases have replaced the confessional schools – though the largest number continue to be church-run.

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy, and King Letsie III is the head of state. The constitution guarantees the citizen, “whatever his race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion”, a list of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including “freedom of conscience”, “freedom of expression” and “freedom from discrimination”.⁷ Article 13 of the constitution of 1993, entitled “Freedom of Conscience”, expressly stipulates that this freedom includes “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 assembly, including religious assembly, is detailed in Article 16.

Incidents

Lesotho is ranked by the human rights organisation Freedom House as a "free" country.⁸ During the period of this report, which saw the election of a new government under Prime Minister Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili on 28th February 2015,⁹ there were no particular institutional changes or other notable events in relation to religious freedom.

In this climate of freedom, the Catholic Church in Lesotho is able to work freely for a deepening of faith among its adherents. During the *ad limina* visit to the Vatican by the bishops of Namibia and Lesotho on 24th April 2015, Pope Francis told them that even if their local societies were confronted with numerous challenges, the task was still to promote the Christian faith. At a time "of an apparent decrease in vocations to the priesthood and religious life", it was important "for priests to speak openly about the fulfilling and joyful experience of offering one's life to Christ", he said.¹⁰

There were tensions at the end of July 2015 resulting from the murder of the former army chief of staff, General Maaparankoe Mahao. His killers were soldiers themselves. The Army is divided into factions, fighting for power and influence. Despite this, the elections in 2015 were judged to have been fair and transparent. South Africa fears a flood of refugees from Lesotho, its diminutive neighbour. Lesotho is one of the poorest nations on the continent. Last year the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) repeatedly called for a non-violent solution to the problems and expressed their solidarity with the people of Lesotho.¹¹ In a statement published after the killing in 2015, they declared: "We are shocked that such a horrendous act was done by some members of the Lesotho Defence Forces. This action reflects the predicament in which many Basotho people find themselves, that they are not safe in their own Country. It brings fear and threatens the foundations of human rights, especially the right to life, and throws out the democratic principles on which many Constitutions are founded."

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

At the beginning of 2016, the continuing drought in southern Africa presented the totally landlocked country of Lesotho with yet further challenges. The government appealed to the world for support. Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili spoke of 650,000 people threatened with extreme hunger in his country. Where poverty bites, religiously-motivated tensions are often not far behind.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_130_2.asp

² Lesotho Evangelicals.

³ CIA, The World Factbook 2016, estimate, July 2015

⁴ CIA, The World Factbook 2016.

⁵ U.S. State Department, International Religious Freedom Report 2014

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁶ U.S. State Department, International Religious Freedom Report 2013

⁷ The Constitution of Lesotho, (2001 Version), http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=216171

⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lesotho>

⁹ Munzinger Archiv 2015

¹⁰ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/04/24/papst_franziskus_an_die_bisch%C3%B6fe_von_lesotho_namibia/1139316

¹¹ <http://fides.org/de/news/36642#.VrYu6U9zDA4>