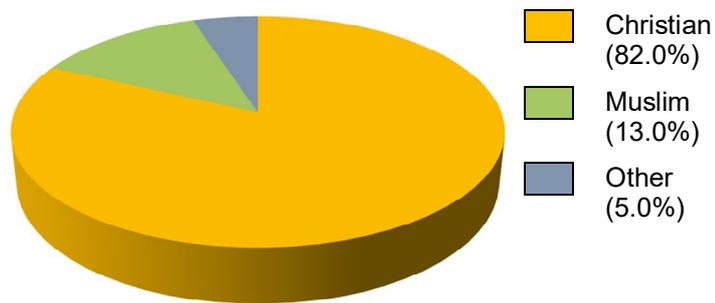
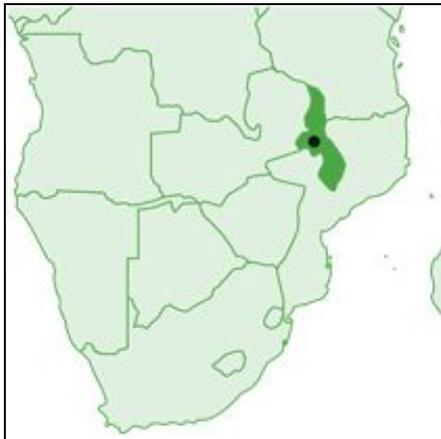


MALAWI



Area: 118,484 km ²	Population¹: 17,964,697	Political system: Democracy ²	Major Language(s): English , Chichewa ³
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Legal Framework on Freedom of Religion and its application

The Republic of Malawi lies at the point where the predominantly Christian populations of southern Africa meet the region of East Africa where Islam has also been strongly represented for centuries. In Malawi, Catholics are 21 percent of all Christians and as such are the largest Christian group, followed by the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian.⁴ There are also smaller groups of Anglicans, Baptists, Adventists and Evangelicals, as well as those of other faiths, including Hindus, Baha'is, Jews and Rastafarians. Meanwhile, Muslims make up a strong minority. The form of Islam practised in Malawi is 90 percent Sunni. Most of the Muslims live along the shores of Lake Malawi, one of the largest inland lakes in Africa.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion.⁵ Religious groups are required by law to register with the authorities.⁶ However, the content of their belief and their activities are not monitored by the state. Religious studies – Bible knowledge, moral and religious education – is compulsory in primary schools, depending on the religious faith or denomination of the pupils. According to the constitution, the aim here is to overcome religious intolerance.⁷ Apart from this, there is a broad spectrum of religious educational establishments in Malawi. In addition to the different faith schools, these include radio and television stations which operate without state interference, provided the broadcasts “are not offensive to the religious convictions of any section of the population”.⁸

Incidents

There were no particular institutional changes or noteworthy events in relation to religious freedom during the period in question. In the majority Muslim district of Mangochi, however, there were massive protests by Muslims against a local school official for including Bible knowledge in the primary school syllabus, instead of the broader moral and religious education course. Protesters forcibly removed his belongings from his office and living quarters and threw them on the street. He was later transferred to another district.⁹

Despite this particular incident, relations between religions and faith communities in Malawi are generally marked by mutual respect, as reflected by the various bodies who worked together on the Malawi Electoral Support Network on human rights and civic education issues. These included the Interfaith Public Affairs Committee, the Muslim Association of Malawi, the Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi, the Islamic Information Bureau and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. Members of the different faiths have also worked together in various areas of business and civil life.¹⁰

There is however a growing problem of xenophobic attacks on Malawian migrants and migrant workers across the border in South Africa.¹¹ On 22nd April 2015 Vatican Radio reported on recurrent episodes of violence in that country. In one attack in early April 2015, seven people were killed. 300 people were arrested for the attacks. The initial cause was an inflammatory speech by the Zulu king. It led to a spate of violent attacks against migrants from other parts of Africa, including many from Malawi and neighbouring states such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique. A primary cause has been the frustration of local South African people at high unemployment. Many migrants were forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in improvised refugee camps, while their homes and businesses were looted and burned. According to the UNHCR, more than 5,000 people had already been made homeless by the time of the Vatican Radio report.¹² Enrico Casale, reporting in the journal *Africa*, published by the White Fathers, an African missionary congregation, observes that these confrontations are nothing new. He said: "Of course, it is the constant repetition of a phenomenon that has already veritably exploded in the last few years. In South Africa, although it is a strongly developed country, there are profound economic differences. On the one side, we have a small percentage of rich people: the whites and the newly-rich blacks. And, on the other side, we have a huge number of poor. And now this extremely poor section of the population is in conflict with the migrants, because of the lack of jobs."¹³ He added: "I do not think that South Africa can quickly resolve the problem. More than 20 years after the end of apartheid, there are still huge differences in South Africa. But these long political processes are going to take a lot of time; it is certainly not going to happen quickly."¹⁴

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Clearly, much-talked-about solidarity among African nations has its limits when it comes to the question of how to deal with the refugees and migrants from the poorest countries, such as Malawi. And, on top of this, according to reports from the UNHCR in January 2016, there are a growing number of refugees from Mozambique arriving in Malawi.¹⁵ These are people who have fled the fighting between units of the Mozambican government in Maputo and the opposition RENAMO rebels. Most of the 1,300 or so refugees registered in January 2016 were from the Tete province in the west of Mozambique. They reported that Mozambican government troops, seeking out rebel fighters, had attacked their villages and persecuted the fleeing inhabitants. According to the UNHCR, the situation of the refugees had sharply deteriorated by the beginning of 2016 because the influx of refugees was continuing and there was now a danger of disease (above all cholera and malaria). Caring for these refugees, both socially and pastorally, is now an additional challenge for the Churches and religious communities. As experience has shown, where there is extreme poverty and members of different religions live close together, the danger of religiously motivated tensions can also arise.¹⁶

¹ CIA, The World Factbook 2016, estimate July 2015

² For the first 30 years of independence Malawi was run by an authoritarian and quixotic President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, but democratic institutions have taken a firm hold since he relinquished power in the mid-1990s;
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13864367>

³ Languages: English (official language), Chichewa (official and vehicular language), Chinyanja, Chiyao, Chitumbuka, Chilomwe, Chinkhonde, Chingoni, Chisena, Chitonga, Chinyakyusa, Chilambya; CIA, The World Factbook 2016

⁴ U. S. State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, Article 33 "Freedom of conscience",
http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=218796

⁶ U. S. State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*; U. S. State Department: International Religious Freedom Report for 2013

¹¹ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/04/22/s%C3%BCdafrika_fremden-feindliche_%C3%BCbergriffe_auf_migranten/1138739

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/5698dbff6.html>