

# Namibia



Stable / Unchanged —

## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **90.9%**
- Agnostics : **2.3%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **5.8%**
- Others : **1.0%**

2,514,000

824,116 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Before and during Germany's colonisation of the former South West Africa, extensive missionary activity was conducted, mainly by Protestant missionaries.<sup>[1]</sup> This heritage is clearly visible to this day given the high numbers of Christians in the country. Christianity continues to shape religious life in Namibia – even though it has been criticised for the part it played in colonial times.<sup>[2]</sup>

Many believers combine elements of Christian belief and practice with traditional African rites and customs. Article 10 of the Namibian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and protects citizens from religious discrimination<sup>[3]</sup> Article 21 lays down the “freedom to practise any religion”, while Article 19 refers more broadly to culture: “Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this constitution.”

Namibia is a secular state in which no religious community receives preferential treatment<sup>[4]</sup> This model of Church-state relations, which is based on the constitution, is reflected in Namibian government policy. The state places no restrictions on the establishment of religious communities. Official recognition through registration is possible but not mandatory. Religious organisations generating income through projects must register as charitable associations with the Ministry of Trade and Industry.<sup>[5]</sup> The Council of Churches in Namibia and the Association of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches in Namibia are influential.<sup>[6]</sup> The Catholic Church of Namibia is widely recognised as a main religious denomination and a moral authority.

## Incidents

During the period under review, some religious communities complained of difficulties in obtaining visas for foreign employees to do religious work but the same requirements apply to secular employment permits.<sup>[7]</sup>

During the Catholic Bishops of Namibia and Lesotho's ad limina visit to the Vatican in April 2015, Archbishop Nashenda Liborius Ndumbukuti of Windhoek, Chairman of the Namibian Bishops' Conference, stated: "[W]e have good relations with state authorities, pursuant to an agreement of understanding, to the point that we have designated a person to liaise between the Episcopal Conference and the government. We cooperate but we remain an independent voice from the authorities. The government still appreciates our efforts and provides subsidies to our schools and hospitals."<sup>[8]</sup>

During the reporting period, there were no serious reports of religious freedom violations in Namibia.<sup>[9]</sup> A dispute took place between the authorities and local Muslims concerning the religious activities of nine Muslims who had entered from South Africa and who were deported by the government.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Prospects for freedom of religion

The concept of a nation characterised by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is manifested in a particularly positive way in Namibia and hence religious freedom is not expected to deteriorate.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] Daniel Pelz, 'Missionierung in Afrika: Mehr als nur das Wort Gottes (Missionary Work in Africa: More than Just the Word of God)', Deutsche Welle, 30th April 2017, <http://www.dw.com/de/missionierung-in-afrika-mehr-als-nur-das-wort-gottes/a-38600890>, (accessed on 16th February 2018).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Namibia's Constitution of 1990 with Amendments through 2014, [constituteproject.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Namibia\\_2014.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Namibia_2014.pdf?lang=en), (accessed on 16th February 2018).

[4] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Namibia', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 2nd April 2018).

[5] Ibid.

[6] 'Munzinger Länder: Namibia', Munzinger Archiv 2018, <https://www.munzinger.de/search/start.jsp>, (accessed 30th March 2018).

[7] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[8] 'President of the Episcopal Conference: "Namibia is a stable Country, but the gap between rich and poor increases"', Agenzia Fides, 24th April 2015, [http://www.fides.org/en/news/37685-AFRICA\\_NAMIBIA\\_President\\_of\\_the\\_Episcopal\\_Conference\\_Namibia\\_is\\_a\\_stable\\_Country\\_but\\_the\\_gap\\_between\\_rich\\_and\\_po](http://www.fides.org/en/news/37685-AFRICA_NAMIBIA_President_of_the_Episcopal_Conference_Namibia_is_a_stable_Country_but_the_gap_between_rich_and_po) (accessed 1st April 2018).

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[10] Ibid.