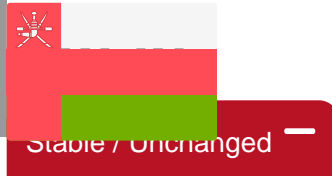


## Religious Freedom Report



### Religion

### Population

### Area

- Muslims : **88.4%**
- Christians : **4.3%**
- Hindus : **5.4%**
- Others : **1.9%**

4.654.000

309.500 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Oman is a sultanate located on the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. Three-quarters of its population, including the ruling dynasty, are Ibadi Muslims.<sup>[1]</sup> Neither Sunni nor Shi'a, Ibadis are descendants of an early branch of Islam. Oman is the only country in the world that has an Ibadi majority. The rest of the population consists of Sunnis and, to a lesser extent, Shi'as. A small number of Christian and Hindu families have been naturalised. Hindus have lived in Oman for centuries, having settled originally in Muscat.

Non-citizen residents, mostly foreign workers, make up around 45 percent of the country's population<sup>[2]</sup> Among them are Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs. There are three Hindu temples and two Sikh gurdwaras.

About 180,000 Christians of different denominations live in Oman. Over 60 Christian groups are registered with the government. The Protestant and Catholic communities are recognised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs<sup>[3]</sup>

There are four Catholic parishes in Oman (two in Muscat, one in Sohar and one in Salalah). The parishes fall under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA). According to Church sources, the Catholic population numbers around 80,000.

The constitution of 1996, as amended in 2011,<sup>4</sup> states in Article 1: "The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab, Islamic, Independent State with full sovereignty." Article 3 declares: "The religion of the state is Islam and Islamic *Shari'a* is the basis for legislation." Article 28 says: "The freedom to practise religious rites according to recognised customs is protected, provided it does not violate the public order or contradict morals."

Oman has no law that criminalises apostasy from Islam. However, a father who converts from Islam loses his paternal rights over his children.

Under Article 209 of Oman's Penal Code, anyone "who (1) publicly blasphemes God or the prophet Mohammed, (2) commits an affront to religions and faiths by spoken or written word, or (3) breaches the peace of a lawful religious gathering" is subject to "a term of imprisonment of between 10 days to three years, or a fine between five and 500 Omani Riyals (roughly US\$13 to \$1,300)".<sup>[5]</sup> *Shari'a* also applies in matters of inheritance and marriage to non-Muslims (Law 32 in Personal Status of 1997).<sup>[6]</sup>

"Using the Internet in a way that 'might prejudice public order or religious values' carries a penalty of up to one year in prison, and fines of at least 1,000 Riyals."<sup>[7]</sup>

Imams must possess a licence and preach the sermons issued by the government.<sup>[8]</sup>

The government does not allow religious groups to proselytise in public, but they can do so in private in registered places of worship.<sup>[9]</sup>

Non-Muslim groups may practise their religion according to their values, customs, and traditions without interference but only on land "specifically donated by the Sultan for the purpose of collective worship"<sup>[10]</sup> Religious gatherings are allowed only within government-approved places of worship.

## Incidents

There were no reports of governmental or societal abuse of religious freedom within the time period of this report. The lack of space for non-Muslim communities to worship and the difficulty of expanding remain a problem in Oman.

## Prospects for freedom of religion

Although Oman has seen itself caught up in regional tensions, especially Sunni-Shi'a conflicts, it has succeeded in maintaining a relatively neutral position. It is well-known that Oman shares good relations with Iran which it has tried to maintain despite regional pressure. It is from this pressure that problems with the already limited freedom of religion might arise in the future.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Oman', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 25th February 2018).

[2] 'Oman: Population by nationality (Omani/non-Omani), sex and age group (mid-2014), Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, October 2014, <http://gulfmigration.eu/bahrain-population-by-nationality-omani-non-omani-sex-and-age-group-mid-2014/>, (accessed 18th March 2018).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Oman', International Religious Freedom Report for 2014, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2014religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 18th March 2018).

[4] Oman's Constitution of 1996 with Amendments through 2011, [constituteproject.org](http://constituteproject.org), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Oman\\_2011.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Oman_2011.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 27th February 2018).

[5] Global Legal Research Directorate and Hanibal Goitom, 'Oman', Laws Criminalizing Apostasy, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/index.php#oman>, (accessed 25th February 2018).

[6] Ibid.

[7] 'Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 'Oman', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, op. cit.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] 'Tradition of tolerance in Oman endures', Times of Oman, 25th July 2014, <http://timesofoman.com/article/37761/Oman/Tradition-of-tolerance-in-Oman-endures>, (accessed 18th February 2018).

[12] The Al Amana Centre is a Protestant organisation that fosters dialogue and mutual learning between Muslims and Christians. To know more about it, click here <http://www.alamanacentre.org>.

[13] A. F. Weber, 'Religiöse Toleranz in Oman', in Deutschlandfunkkultur, Deutschlandradio, 12th July 2015, [http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/sultanat-religioese-toleranz-in-oman.1278.de.html?dram:article\\_id=325183](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/sultanat-religioese-toleranz-in-oman.1278.de.html?dram:article_id=325183), (accessed 18th February 2018).