



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **94.7%**
- Agnostics : **2.2%**
- Hindus : **1.5%**
- Others : **1.6%**

97.000

457 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, to the North East of Madagascar. The nation was named after the French Minister of Finance, Vicomte Moreau des Séchelles, by the commander of a French expedition in 1756. The then uninhabited islands were originally settled by the French in 1770 before the British took control during the Napoleonic Wars. The country gained independence in 1976 with the exception of some islands retained as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

The constitution guarantees the right to the “equal protection of the law [...] without discrimination on any ground except as is necessary in a democratic society”.^[1] Every person has the right to freedom of thought and religion. This includes the freedom to change religion. It also includes the right “either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate the religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance”. This entitlement may be subject to limitations, if they are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of “defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the rights or freedoms of other persons”.

The population is mainly Christian. The Catholic Church is by far the largest religious community (over 75 percent of the population). There are also Anglicans, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, as well as other Christian groups. There are small numbers of Hindus, Muslims, Baha'is and other non-Christian groups. One hundred years ago, the Muslim population was around 50. Sources suggest it is now between 1,000 and 2,000. There is a Hindu temple in Victoria and the government has declared the Taipposam Kavadi Festival a holiday for Hindus.

The constitution prohibits any legislation which provides for the establishment of any religion or the imposition of any religious observance. The profession of any particular religion or belief must not be a necessary condition for assuming

public office. No one shall be compelled to take an oath contrary to their belief or religion.

By law all religious groups must be registered, either as corporations or as associations. Registration as associations is done at the Registrar General's Office in Victoria, with few formalities. The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Baha'is, and the Islamic Society of Seychelles have been constituted as corporations by means of separate legislative acts. There are no penalties for failure to register, but registration is necessary in order to benefit from certain social entitlements. For example, it is not possible to broadcast religious programmes on state media without registration.

Under the constitution, no one attending a "place of education" shall be forced to receive religious instruction or take part in any religious ceremony or observance. However, this does not "preclude any religious community or denomination from providing religious instruction for persons of that community or denomination in the course of any education provided by that community or denomination". Both Catholics and Anglicans provide education during school hours. The Catholic Diocese of Victoria is working with the Ministry of Education towards opening the first Catholic private school in modern times, in 2020.^[2] Any child of any religious denomination will be eligible for entry to the school.

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, but the government controls much of the country's media, and there are certain limitations on such freedom when it comes to religious broadcasting. Although religious organisations may publish newspapers, under the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act 2000 (as consolidated), they are not able to obtain their own broadcasting licences. Instead the government provides air time on a pro rata basis, depending on the size of the organisation's membership. Live religious broadcasting is prohibited with the exception of radio broadcasts of Catholic Masses and Anglican services.^[3] 15-minute pre-recorded prayer slots were made available to registered religious groups.^[4] Some smaller groups complain that they are not afforded their own broadcast time.^[5]

The country's public holidays reflect the Catholic majority of the population. They include the feasts of Corpus Christi, the Assumption, All Saints and the Immaculate Conception, together with Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day and Labour Day.

As independent observers acknowledge, religious freedom is generally respected by the government in the Seychelles.^[6] Churches and other religious groups function without government interference and feel at liberty to raise matters of concern to them in public and to criticise the government. The Churches have been strong advocates of democracy and human rights in the country.

| Incidents

During the period under review, there were no episodes of religiously-motivated discrimination and state employees were given paid leave to celebrate the major religious festivals.

The Seychelles Interfaith Council (SIFCO) annually holds an interfaith harmony week. SIFCO is composed of Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Muslims and other religions, to promote tolerance and dialogue. In February 2018 the event was attended by Vice President Vincent Meriton, members of the National Assembly, members of civil society, as well as representatives and members of the Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles.^[7]

A book on the history of Islam in the Seychelles was published in December 2016. The book launch was attended by the first president of the Seychelles, James Mancham; the President of the Court of Appeal Francis MacGregor, and members of the diplomatic corps.^[8]

| Prospects for freedom of religion

The situation of the freedom of religion in the Seychelles has remained unchanged since 2016 without any recorded instances of societal action affecting religious freedom. No restrictions are in place on religious worship by any

denominations and tax-free status is granted by the government for appropriately registered religious groups. However, while guaranteed by the constitution, religious freedom was restricted in some areas, particularly in regard to the need for government approval for the transmission of religious broadcasts.

| Endnotes / Sources

[1] Seychelles's Constitution of 1993 with Amendments through 2011, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Seychelles_2011.pdf, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[2] Sharon Ernesta, 'Seychelles to Get Private School in 2020 with Emphasis on Moral, Spiritual Values', Seychelles News Agency, 22th July 2017
<http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/7604/Seychelles+to+get+private+school+in++with+emphasis+on+moral%2C+spiritual+values>
(accessed 17th February 2018).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Seychelles', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[4] Bureau of Democracy..., Op cit.

[5] Ibid.

[6] 'Seychelles', Freedom in the World 2016, Freedom House <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/seychelles>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[7] 'Sifco appeals for interfaith unity and good dialogue', Seychelles Nation, 3rd February 2018
<http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=257522>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[8] 'New book on Muslims in Seychelles launched', Seychelles Nation, 2nd December 2016
<http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=257522>, (accessed 17th February 2018).