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Nigeria

International Religious Freedom Report
 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
 October 2001


The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice in certain respects.

The status of respect for religious freedom deteriorated during the year due to the implementation of an expanded version of Shari'a (Islamic law) in several northern states, which challenged constitutional protections for religious freedom and sparked interreligious violence. The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting an official religion; however, it also provides that states may elect to use Islamic (Shari'a) customary law and courts. Following the lead of Zamfara state, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, and Bauchi states also adopted varying forms of criminal Shari'a law. Government discrimination based on religion continued during the period covered by this report. Although Christians are exempt from Shari'a law, the ramifications of expanded Shari'a law infringed upon the rights of non-Muslims in the north to live in a society governed by secular laws.

Interreligious tension decreased in Kaduna state during the period covered by this report; however, other states, such as Zamfara and Gombe, saw interreligious tensions rise. While the widespread rioting that occurred in February and May 2000 was not repeated, there were reports of clashes between Muslims and Christians during the period covered by this report. There was some societal discrimination against religious minorities.

U.S. Embassy officials regularly discussed religious freedom issues with various federal, state and local officials. U.S. Embassy officials and U.S. Government officials based in Washington advocated the peaceful resolution of ethnic and religious conflicts in the country. The U.S. Government stressed that human rights and religious freedom must be respected in any resolution of the Shari'a question.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of 356,700 square miles, and its population is estimated to be 120 million; however, there has not been an accurate census for more than 30 years, and many observers believe that the country's population may significantly exceed this figure. Approximately half of the country's population practice Islam; approximately 40 percent practice Christianity, and approximately 10 percent practice exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion. Many persons practice elements of Christianity or Islam and elements of a traditional indigenous religion. The predominant form of Islam in the country is Sunni. The Christian population includes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and a growing number of evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Catholics constitute the largest Christian denomination.

There is a strong correlation between religious differences and ethnic and regional diversity. The north, which is dominated by the large Hausa and Fulani (Peuhl) ethnic groups, is predominantly Muslim; however, there are significant numbers of Christians in the middle belt and urban centers of the north, particularly in Kaduna and Jos. In the southwest, where the large Yoruba ethnic group is dominant, there is no dominant religion; Islam is practiced in a plurality, if not a majority, of the largest cities of the southwest due, in part, to the Hausa and Fulani communities in those regions. Many Yorubas practice Islam or Christianity, while others continue to practice the traditional Yoruba religion, which includes a belief in a supreme deity and the worship of lesser deities that serve as agents of the supreme deity in aspects of daily life. In the east, where the large Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics and Methodists are in the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites and ceremonies.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country and include Jesuits, Dominicans, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), the Church of Christ, and the Society for International Missions. Rough estimates put the number of foreign missionaries at over 1,000, with many in the area around Jos, in Plateau state.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom
Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice in certain respects.

The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting an official religion; however, some Christians have alleged that Islam has been adopted as the de facto state religion of several northern states, given the reintroduction of Shari'a criminal law, and the continued use of state resources to fund the construction of mosques, the teaching of Alkalis (Muslim judges), and pilgrimages to Mecca (Hajj). However, state funds also are used to fund Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In general states with a clear Christian or Muslim majority explicitly favor the majority faith. There are 36 states in the country; governors have autonomy in decision-making but derive their resources from the federal Government. Both the federal and state governments are involved in religious matters, including the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools, subsidized construction of churches and mosques, state-sponsored participation in the Hajj, and pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

The Constitution provides that states may elect to use Islamic (Shari'a) customary law and courts. Until the reintroduction of criminal Shari'a by Zamfara State in January 2000, the jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which are part of the regular court system, had been limited to family or personal law cases involving Muslims, or to civil disputes between Muslims who consent to the courts' jurisdiction. However, the Constitution states that a Shari'a court of appeal may exercise "such other jurisdiction as may be conferred upon it by the law of the State." Some states have interpreted this language as granting them the right to expand the jurisdiction of existing Shari'a courts to include criminal matters (see Section III). On October 8, 1999, the governor of Zamfara state, Ahmed Sani, signed a bill that established Shari'a courts and courts of appeal in Zamfara state, and another bill that constituted the Shari'a penal code; the bills took effect on January 27, 2000. Zamfara's law adopted traditional Shari'a in its entirety, with the exception that apostasy was not criminalized. Other Muslim communities, particularly from the states of Kano, Niger, Sokoto, Jigawa, Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, and Katsina states, began to echo the call for Shari'a in their states. At the end of the period covered by this report, ten northern states had adopted variations of Shari'a law—Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, and Bauchi. Adherence to the new Shari'a provisions is compulsory for Muslims in some states and optional in others. The Constitution also provides that the federal Government is to establish a Federal Shari'a Court of Appeal and Final Court of Appeal; however, the Government had not yet established such courts by the end of the period covered by this report.

In November 1999, President Obasanjo expressed the view that the expanded Shari'a provisions were unconstitutional; however, the federal Government did not intervene legally to annul the provisions. Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of Shari'a criminal statutes through the courts; however, no challenges with adequate legal standing had made their way through the appellate system by the end of the period covered by this report. Huri-Laws, a domestic human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO), challenged the constitutionality of Zamfara Shari'a statutes in two separate cases. Huri-Laws was the plaintiff in the first case, and a Christian citizen from Zamfara state was the plaintiff in the second case. The Zamfara state high court dismissed both cases, ruling that the statute did not infringe on the rights of either plaintiff.

Christian and Islamic groups planning to build new churches or mosques are required to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The law requires that such groups name a board of trustees, place a notice of the group's intent to organize in three nationwide newspapers, and send trustee information to the CAC. If no objections are received, the group can proceed with its meetings. This law was put into effect to stem the proliferation of new buildings in the absence of zoning laws, to resolve legal questions arising from disputes over church ownership and control, to provide a single registry for government reference in the event that compensation is demanded following civil disturbances, and to allow for legal solemnization of marriages. The CAC did not deny registration to any religious group during the period covered by this report; however, some religious groups experienced delays in obtaining permission from local zoning boards to build houses of worship.

The military's chaplaincy corps includes imams, Catholic priests, and Protestant pastors. There were no reports in the military of discrimination or nonadvancement to senior positions due to religious beliefs. No one religious faith dominates the senior ranks of the military.

The Government remained a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) during the period covered by this report and continued to send representatives to the annual meeting in Cairo despite concerns of Christian citizens that that this action undermined the concept of a secular state.

Each year the Government declares the following Islamic and Christian festival days as national holidays: Eidelkabit, Eidelfitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eidelmaulud, and Christmas Day.

Some state governors actively have encouraged interfaith and interethnic discussions. For example, Kaduna state governor Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi appointed Muslims and Christians to reconciliation committees following the riots of February and May 2000. Governor Makarfi also consulted with the reconciliation committees on proposed criminal law reforms.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Throughout the year, the Government nominally required organizers of outdoor public functions to apply for permits, although both government authorities and those assembling often ignored this requirement. The

Government retained legal authority to ban gatherings whose political, ethnic, or religious content might lead to unrest. In September 2000, police in Lagos denied the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) a permit to hold a workshop on the adoption of Shari'a law. In 2000 several northern state governments banned open air preaching and public religious processions. The Kogi state government enacted such a ban on March 1, 2000; however, the ban was lifted by the end of the period covered by this report. The Kaduna state government followed shortly thereafter, enacting a ban on all forms of processions, rallies, demonstrations, and meetings in public places. Such bans were viewed as necessary public safety measures after approximately 2,000 people died in Shari'a related violence nationwide in 2000 (see Section III). For example, in March 2001, the authorities in Kaduna State cancelled a civil rights conference on Shari'a due to fears of potential violence from vigilante groups. None of these bans had been lifted formally by the end of the period covered by this report; however, state governments granted some permits on a case-by-case basis. In the southern part of the country, large outdoor religious gatherings continued to be common.

Following nationwide Shari'a-related violence in 2000, many northern states banned public proselytizing, although it is permitted by the Constitution. Some states relaxed these restrictions informally during the reporting period, and allowed some public proselytizing by Christians and Muslims. Missionaries reported that law enforcement officials harassed them when they proselytized outside of their designated zones. Both Christian and Muslim organizations alleged that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Department restricted the entry into the country of certain religious practitioners, particularly persons suspected of intending to proselytize. Proselytizing did not appear to be restricted in the southern part of the country. Many missionary groups also have noted bureaucratic delays and obstruction and attempts to extort money for the processing of necessary residence permits for foreigners; however, many foreign businesses and other nonreligious organizations also have encountered similar difficulties.

Although the expanded Shari'a laws technically do not apply to Christians, the Christian minority, especially in Zamfara state, was affected by many of the social provisions of the laws, such as the separation of the sexes in public transportation vehicles and bans on the sale of alcohol and alcohol consumption. Niger State has also enforced a ban on the selling of alcohol. In Zamfara state, Christian associations have arranged for private transportation services for Christian females so that they are not forced to wait for female only transportation provided by the Zamfara state government. Sokoto state's transportation system is run completely by private operators. Sokoto state governor Dalhatu Bafarawa said that the state cannot compel private operators to carry female passengers if doing so violates their religious convictions. In Zamfara state schoolchildren continued to be segregated by gender in schools. The Governor of Zamfara also disbursed public funds to refurbish mosques and pronounced that only persons with beards would win government contracts. There is a long tradition of separating schoolchildren by gender in the north; this practice was codified in Kebbi and Sokoto states in May 2000.

In Zamfara state, laws proposed during the period covered by this report included a dress code for women that bans short skirts and trousers, the mandatory closing of shops on Fridays, and a ban of video rental clubs. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) branch in Zamfara state has protested these new laws to the Zamfara state government. Reportedly they were told that the first law was proposed on public decency grounds, and that the second law only would apply to Muslim businesses.

Military bases are considered Shari'a free zones under the new laws; however, on at least one occasion, delivery of alcohol to a base in Kano was forcibly interdicted by Kano vigilantes (see Section III).

All Muslims in states that expanded Shari'a to criminal matters are subject to the new Shari'a criminal codes. In Zamfara state, all cases involving Muslims must be heard by a Shari'a court. Other states with Shari'a law still permit Muslims to choose common law courts for criminal cases; however, societal pressure forces most Muslims to use the Shari'a court system.

In March 2001, journalists covering the implementation of Shari'a law in Bauchi state were warned by the governor, Ahmed Mu'azu, that they would be prosecuted if they misrepresented the Government's position on Shari'a; however, no journalists were arrested by the end of the period covered by this report.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, state government officials discriminated against adherents of minority religions in hiring practices and in the awarding of state contracts.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states also alleged that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new Christian churches. Officials have responded that many of these new churches are being formed in traditionally residential neighborhoods that were not zoned for religious purposes. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) offices in Zamfara and Sokoto states alleged that local authorities there delayed or denied to Christians certificates of occupancy (CO's), which are required to show title to land. For example, the Catholic Church in Zamfara state has been unable to retake possession of a clinic that was confiscated during a period of military rule in the 1970's. Renewal of the CO for the church building was approved; however, the Church has been unable to obtain a CO to reoccupy the clinic building and the adjoining land. Zamfara and Sokoto state officials denied that discrimination was behind the cases cited by CAN. State officials said the certification boards were dealing with a large backlog of cases for all persons, regardless of religious faith.

Although religious belief or adherence is not required for membership in registered political parties, in May 2001, the Zamfara state house assembly suspended for 3 months two of its Muslim members, Ibrahim Musa Murai and Abdullahi Majidadi Kurya, for not supporting bills introduced by the governor. They were accused of not showing full support for a compulsory closing of businesses, schools, and hospitals during Friday

prayers and an enforced zakkat (alms) payment to assist the needy.

Although distribution of religious publications remained generally unrestricted, the Government continued to enforce lightly a ban on published religious advertisements. There were reports by Christians in Zamfara state that the state government restricted the distribution of religious (Christian) literature. In 2000 Bishop Samson Bala of Gusau Diocese said that the state radio station had closed its doors to Christians. According to the Bishop Bala, commercials and paid advertisements containing Christian content were not accepted, and only Islamic religious programs were aired. Similar discrimination against the use of state-owned media for Muslim programming was reported in the south.

According to the Constitution, students are not required to receive instruction relating to a religion other than their own; however, public school students throughout the country were subjected to mandatory Islamic or Christian religious instruction. Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools in Zamfara and other northern states, to the exclusion of Christianity. State authorities claim that students are permitted to decline to attend these classes or to request a teacher of their own religion to provide alternative instruction; however, in practice the dominant religion of the state is taught in the school, and students cannot use these other mechanisms. There are reports that Christianity is taught in the same manner in Enugu and Edo states, and that Muslim students cannot access Koranic teaching in the public schools. During the period covered by this report, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leaders volunteered to place teachers of Christianity in Zamfara and Sokoto state schools, where students alleged that they were being forced to take courses in Islamic religious knowledge in order to graduate. Governors of both states accepted the offer of assistance and stated that they had not been aware of the problem; however, CAN did not provide any teachers in either state during the reporting period. They indicated that schools in rural areas may not have qualified teachers of Biblical or Christian education classes, and that students in such schools have a right to opt out of Koranic knowledge classes, which otherwise would be required.

The Government continued to enforce a 1987 ban on religious organizations on campuses of primary schools, although individual students retain the right to practice their religions in recognized places of worship.

On December 5, 2000, over 1,500 Muslim students from the University of Ibadan and Ibadan public schools gathered at Oyo state government offices to protest the failure of public schools to offer Islamic studies courses alongside Christian courses. On November 30, 2000, the students also protested an attack by Christian theology students, described as Crusaders, on Islamic leaders, teachers, and students at Immanuel College Primary School. The police arrested the attackers but later released them without charge (see Section III).

The Government continued to settle property claims by Muslim Brotherhood leader Ibrahim El-Zakzaky for compensation for his home and mosque, which were razed by law enforcement in 1997.

There are no legal provisions barring women or other groups from testifying in civil court or giving their testimony less weight; however, the testimony of women and non-Muslims is usually accorded less weight in Shari'a courts. For example, if one woman testifies, a second woman must also provide testimony to equal the weight of the testimony of one man.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The extension of Shari'a law in many northern states generated a public debate on whether Shari'a punishments such as amputation for theft, and caning for fornication and public drunkenness constituted "torture or ... inhuman or degrading treatment" as stipulated in the Constitution. Some northern states have administered amputations and canings pursuant to expanded Shari'a law. For example, on May 3, 2001, the government of Zamfara state amputated the hand of Lawal Isa Buzu, a convicted bicycle thief. The victim voluntarily submitted to the full Shari'a proceedings, including amputation, and chose not to appeal the decision. In September 2000, a Sokoto Shari'a court handed down a sentence of amputation for a thief; the sentence had not been carried out by year's end. In early July 2000, a sentence of amputation was carried out against a convicted thief.

In January 2001, Zamfara state officials caned 14-year old Bariya Magazu for fornication because she bore a child out of wedlock. Magazu reportedly was forced by her father to provide sexual favors to three men to whom he owed debts. Instead of prosecuting the three men for statutory rape, the court required Ms. Magazu to produce four witnesses to corroborate her testimony. Because she could not produce four witnesses, the Shari'a court handed down a sentence of 100 lashes for fornication and 80 additional lashes for bearing false testimony. Magazu appealed and the sentence temporarily was suspended; however, the judge eventually imposed a reduced sentence of 100 lashes. Magazu continued her appeal contesting the propriety of her conviction under Islamic law. Magazu's appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Other convicted Muslim criminals in Shari'a law states were subjected to public caning for various minor offenses, such as petty theft, consumption of alcohol, and engaging in prostitution. For example, in August 2000, two motorcycle taxi drivers were caned for carrying Muslim female passengers in violation of the law in Zamfara State. Indigent persons without legal representation were more likely to have their sentences carried out immediately upon being sentenced.

Non-Muslims are not subject to Shari'a statutes; however, a Christian was tried for assault in a criminal Shari'a court in Kano state after he voluntarily chose that jurisdiction, apparently because the penalty of caning was less onerous than the potential penalty under common law.

A number of state sanctioned and private vigilante Shari'a enforcement groups have formed in states with expanded Shari'a law (see Section III). In Zamfara state, Governor Ahmed Sani vested the local vigilante group with full powers of arrest and prosecution because he believed that the police were not enforcing the new Shari'a laws. Governor Saminu Turaki of Jigawa state also mobilized a statewide Shari'a enforcement committee to arrest, detain, and prosecute Muslim offenders. In April 2001, the Katsina Arts and Musicians Association wrote to the Katsina House of Assembly protesting the arrest and detention of Sirajo Mai Asharalle. Asharalle was arrested by the state-sanctioned Rundunar Adalci vigilante group while performing music at a local function, but was released soon after his arrest. The performance of music and dancing was banned under the Shari'a law introduced by Katsina state.

On February 24, 2001, 10 persons were killed and 3 persons were injured when youths claiming to be Shi'ite Muslims clashed with police during a protest following the visit of Israeli Ambassador Itzhak Oren to Gombe state. The youths also burned two churches and a nightclub.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Curfews, bans on large religious gatherings outside of traditional houses of worship, bans on religious processions, and bans on proselytization remain in effect; however, some local and state authorities informally relaxed the bans in practice, and allowed some public proselytizing.

During the reporting period, the Government contributed approximately \$3.63 million (400 million naira) to pay restitution to victims of the February 2000 riots. Governor Makarfi of Kaduna state provided a similar amount in state funds.

Since the outbreak of Shari'a-related violence in 2000 (see Section III), the governors of Kaduna, Abia, and Lagos states have taken steps to prevent further violence and tension. During the period covered by this report, the governors made more tempered public statements, and focused on shared economic opportunities between residents of their states and migrants, including ethnic minorities, from other regions of the country. During the period covered by this report, Governor Makarfi of Kaduna state visited many southern and middlebelt states to apologize for the loss of life during the Kaduna riots. He emphasized the importance of respecting ethnic and religious diversity, and he encouraged those who left Kaduna state to return.

Section III: Societal Attitudes

Religious differences often correspond to regional and ethnic differences. For example, the northern region and much of the middlebelt are overwhelmingly Muslim, as are the large Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups of that area. Many southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. Consequently it is often difficult to distinguish between religious conflict and discrimination, and ethnic conflict and discrimination. Religious tensions often underscored what were predominantly ethnic confrontations.

In February and May 2000, rioting between Muslim and Christian groups over the proposed extension of Shari'a in Kaduna caused the deaths of more than 1,500 persons and massive property destruction. Over 500 persons, predominantly of the Hausa ethnic group, were killed in reprisals that took place in Abia, Imo, and other eastern states. While the widespread rioting that occurred in February and May 2000 was not repeated during the period covered by this report, there were reports of clashes between Muslims and Christians.

On September 7, 2000, Christians attacked Muslims during a riot in Bambam, Gombe state, following the visit of a committee investigating public opinion on the introduction of Shari'a law. Governor Abubakar Hashidu stated that 18 Muslims died during the rioting. A number of mosques, churches, shops, homes, and vehicles were destroyed in the riot. In September 2000, Gombe state governor Abubakar Hashidu set up a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate the causes of the religious clash that took place in Bambam in 2000. The 17-member committee includes both Christians and Muslims.

In late November 2000, Muslim youths attacked Christian residents, shops, and buildings in Jigawa state. Reportedly the students were angry about statements made against Islam and the Prophet that appeared in a publication by a National Youth Service Corps member. At least one person died in the violence, and a number of churches and stores were burned.

In December 2000, Muslim students alleged that they were beaten by Christian seminary students from a neighboring school during protests in Lagos state (see Section II).

In May 2001, violence again erupted in Gombe state during legislative debate on the introduction of Shari'a law. Christian groups organized protests in the town of Kano that turned violent. According to a government spokesman, four persons were injured, a number of shops were looted, and a mosque and a church were burned down.

Following the violence related to the expansion of Shari'a law in February and May 2000, several committees were established, both by government officials and by religious leaders, to work for peace and a better understanding between Christians and Muslims, and to obtain a solution to the Shari'a debate (see Section II). During the period covered by this report, committee members traveled to several northern and middle-belt states to appeal for interreligious tolerance.

In July 2000, a Hausa woman who violated a religious taboo against women viewing a Yoruba festival was killed by a mob. This incident ignited reciprocal ethnic violence in the northern, predominately Hausa city of Kano, with the Hausa majority attacking the Yoruba minority. Approximately 80 persons died over a 4 day period; the majority of the victims were Yorubas.

Vigilante groups formed during the period covered by this report to enforce the new Shari'a laws, and in some cases, punish offenders. Some of these vigilante groups were state-sanctioned (see Section II). In January 2001, criminal youths posing as Shari'a enforcers beat Livinus Obi, an Igbo Christian, for allegedly selling beer in Kano State. They also invaded his home, broke bottles of beer, and stole money and liquor. Although the assailants were brought before a Shari'a court on charges of assault and theft, Obi dropped the charges because he feared testifying against neighbors involved in the attack. In early 2000, vigilantes pulled a woman from a motorcycle for breaking the new rule requiring separate transportation for women in a local government area of Zamfara State; she was injured in the attack. The woman was not a Muslim.

In Kano state, an unofficial vigilante group known as Hisbah began taking action against both Muslims and Christians who violate the new Shari'a laws. In February 2001, youths in the Hisbah attacked a truck bringing alcohol to a military base in Kano state, and attacked the Nigeria Union of Journalists press center in Kano following allegations that alcohol was served on the premises. On April 14, 2001, Kano state Deputy Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje led vigilante enforcers and national police to five of Kano's largest hotels and ordered them to stop selling alcohol. Unofficial vigilante officials broke liquor bottles and engaged in minor vandalism at the hotels. On April 16, 2001, the Hisbah burnt down the Henzino Hotel, an establishment known for serving alcohol in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. In April 2001, some Kano state hotels stopped renting conference halls to Christian groups for fear of being targets of this vigilante violence.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, private businesses frequently are guilty of informal religious and ethnic discrimination in their hiring practices and purchasing patterns. In nearly all states, ethnic rivalries between majority groups and minority "immigrants" lead to some societal discrimination against minority ethnic and religious groups.

Purdah, the Islamic practice of keeping girls and women in seclusion from men outside the family, continued in parts of the far north.

In the north, Muslim communities favor boys over girls in deciding which children to enroll in secondary and elementary schools.

Section IV: U.S. Government Policy

U.S. Embassy officials regularly discussed religious freedom issues with various federal, state and local officials. Embassy officials raised religious freedom issues with government officials in the context of the U.S. Government's overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy and in statements from officials in Washington, sought to encourage a peaceful resolution to the Shari'a issue and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in any resolution. The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) also have created programs for conflict resolution training. During a visit to the country in August 2000, former President Clinton appealed for interreligious and interethnic understanding and cooperation.

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