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Sierra Leone

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 29,925 square miles and its population is approximately 5 million. Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available; however, most sources estimate that the population is 60 percent Muslim, 30 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. There is no information concerning the number of atheists in the country.

Many syncretistic practices reportedly exist and many citizens practice a mixture of Islam and traditional indigenous religions or Christianity and traditional indigenous religions.

Historically most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially was declared over in January 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population. Religion was not a factor in the displacement of the more than 500,000 refugees who fled the country or the 2 million persons who were internally displaced.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Religious holidays celebrated as national holidays include the Muslim Eid-el-adha, Maoulid-Un-Nabi, and Eid el-fitir holidays, and the Christian Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas holidays. These observances do not negatively impact any religious groups.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether to attend Muslim- or Christian-oriented classes.



The Government has not taken any specific steps to promote interfaith understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has disappeared as a terrorist organization, although some of its former members have organized into a legal political party that has attracted a small following.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. The IRC criticized the use of force and atrocities committed by the rebels during the war, endorsed reconciliation and peace talks, and facilitated rehabilitation of the victims affected by the war, including former child soldiers.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy is in frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members. In November 2003, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Iftar celebration for Muslims and Islamic leaders. Members of the IRC, including both Christian and Muslim leaders, often are featured in Embassy-hosted Public Diplomacy events, including discussions on the role of religious communities in sustainable development.

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