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U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Somalia

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SOMALIA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom; there were some limits on religious freedom.

There is no central government, but some local administrations, including the "Republic of Somaliland" have made Islam the official religion in their regions, in addition to establishing a judicial system based on Shari'a (Islamic law).

Citizens are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. There are a small number of non-Sunni Muslims. There is also a small, extremely low-profile Christian community. In Somaliland, the number of adherents of radical Islam is growing. During the first 6 months of 1999, there was an influx of foreign Muslims into Hargeisa in Somaliland, reportedly Islamic teachers from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan (see Section II).

In March 1999, the Minister of Religion in Somaliland issued a list of instructions and definitions on religious practices. Under the new rules, religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion's permission to operate. Entry visas for religious groups must be approved by the Ministry, and certain unspecified doctrines are prohibited.

Local tradition and past law make proselytization a crime for any religion except Islam. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operate without interference, provided that they refrain from proselytizing.

In 1998 in Somaliland, the Minister of Religion criticized "foreigners and Christians" for trying to corrupt Islam by speaking out against female genital mutilation (FGM), after religious leaders had agreed publicly at a workshop that FGM is not a religious obligation. The President reportedly admonished the Minister for his remarks.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Non-Sunni Muslims often are viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority. There is strong social pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves controlled by radical Islamists, such as Luuq in the Gedo region.

In the first 6 months of 1999, there was an influx of foreign Muslim teachers into Hargeisa in Somaliland to teach in new private Koranic schools. These schools are inexpensive and provide basic education; however, there were reports that these schools required the veiling of small girls and other conservative Islamic practices not normally found in Somali culture.

There are no ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater religious toleration.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government does not maintain an official presence in Somalia. This lack of diplomatic representation has limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom.

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