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Burundi

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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

There was no change in the status of 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 an area of 10,747 square miles and its population is approximately 7.2 million. Although reliable statistics on the number of followers of various religions are not available, a Roman Catholic official has estimated that 60 percent of the population is Catholic, with the largest concentration of adherents located in the center and south of the country. A Muslim leader has estimated that up to 10 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which lives in urban areas. The remainder of the population belongs to other Christian churches, practices traditional indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation. There are a number of small indigenous groups not affiliated with any major religion, some of which have won adherents by promising miracle cures for HIV/AIDS and other ailments.

Foreign missionary groups of many faiths are active in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, promulgated on March 18, 2005, 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. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies.

There is no state religion. The Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association with a religious nature must file the following with the Ministry: the denomination or affiliation of the religious institution, a copy of its statutes, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. If an association with a religious character fails to register with the Ministry, its representative will be reminded of the requirement to do so. If the representative does not comply, the place of worship or association will be instructed to close down. If it does not close down when ordered to do so, the representative of the religious institution or association can be jailed for 6 months to 5 years.

The Government requires that religious groups maintain a headquarters in the country.

While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Government often waives taxes on imported religious articles used by religious institutions and also often waives taxes on the importation

by religious institutions of goods destined for social development purposes. These exemptions are negotiated with the Finance Ministry on a case-by-case basis, and there is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

The heads of major religious organizations are accorded diplomatic status. Foreign missionary groups openly promote their religious beliefs. The Government has welcomed their development assistance.

The Government recognizes Catholic holy days, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. There are no official Muslim holy days; however, Muslims can take holy days off from both government and private sector jobs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no known abuses of religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

In December 2003, unknown assailants killed Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney near Minago, Bujumbura Rural Province. The motive for the attack is unknown; there is no indication that the attack was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim.

On July 12, 2004, Dieudonne Hakizimana, a Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Force (PALIPEHUTU-FNL) rebel who reportedly admitted to taking part in the December 2003 killing of Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney, died in government custody from reportedly from wounds sustained prior to his capture on February 1, 2004.

On August 8, 2004, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebels reportedly captured a 20-member delegation headed by Anglican Bishop Pie Ntukamazina in Kabezi Commune, Bujumbura Rural Province. Government forces rescued the delegation the same day. The motive for the capture was not known.

On October 18, 2004, in Makamba Province, armed assailants shot and killed Catholic Priest Gerard Nzeyimana. According to press reports, Nzeyimana was specifically targeted; the killers reportedly verified his identity before killing him. *Catholic World News* reported that Nzeyimana was killed for his stance against human rights abuses; a news report from the Fides Agency quoted sources that identified the killers as PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebels.

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.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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

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. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of various religious communities. Through the Ambassador's Self-Help and Democracy and Human Rights funds, the U.S. Embassy has supported Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups in the fields of health, education, and conflict resolution. In addition, the U.S. Embassy funded a range of human rights and democracy programs that support religious, as well as other, civil society organizations.

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