



Somalia (45)

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2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom:**Somalia**

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

U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2000

22/11-00

SOMALIA

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There is no central government, but some local administrations, including the "Republic of Somaliland" and "Puntland," have made Islam the official religion in their regions. Local tradition and past law make proselytization a crime for any religion except Islam. Non-Sunni Muslims often are viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority. Christians and other non-Muslims who proclaim their religion sometimes face societal harassment.

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

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.

Section I. Government Policies of Freedom of Religion**Legal/Policy Framework**

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" and "Puntland", have made Islam the official religion in their regions. The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of traditional and customary law (Xeer), Shari'a law, the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government, or some combination of the three. There are five Islamic courts operating in Mogadishu, which are aligned with different subclans, raising doubts about their independence. These courts generally refrained from administering the stricter Islamic punishments, such as amputation, but their militias administered summary punishments, including executions, in the city and its environs. With the collapse in December 1998 of the Shari'a courts in north Mogadishu headed by Sheikh Ali Dere, the application of physical punishment appears to have ceased.

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.

Religious Demography

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 addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions. In Somaliland, the number of adherents of radical Islam is growing. In 1999 there was an influx of foreign Muslims into Hargeisa in Somaliland, reportedly Islamic teachers from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan (see Section II).

Governmental Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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.

Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens

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. There was an increase in religious intolerance among Muslims by Al'Ittihad, a local radical Islamic group. In north Mogadishu, Al'Ittihad forcibly took over two mosques. There reportedly have been other mosque takeovers in Puntland and Lower Shabelle.

On June 15, 2000, a group of conservative Muslims threw a hand grenade into the compound of the Italian NGO COSV in Merca. The attack started out as a protest against alleged Christian proselytizing by teachers at COSV-funded schools. No one was injured in the attack, but staff members were evacuated, and COSV programs were suspended for 2 weeks.

In 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 is a small, low-profile Christian community. Christians, as well as other non-Muslims, who proclaim their religion sometimes face societal harassment.

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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