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2013 International Religious Freedom Report - Congo, Democratic Republic of the

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and routinely met with religious leaders of all faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 75.5 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 50 percent is Roman Catholic, 35 percent Protestant (including evangelicals), 5 percent Kimbanguist (a Christian Congolese church), and 5 percent Muslim. Religious groups with small populations include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews. The remainder of the population generally adheres to indigenous religious beliefs.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims mainly reside in the provinces of Maniema, Orientale, Kasai Occidental, Bandundu, and Kinshasa. Although present throughout the country, Kimbanguists are primarily concentrated in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom but the government can legally recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups.

A statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utilities regulates the establishment and operation of religious groups. The government grants tax-exempt status to recognized religious groups. The law requires officially recognized religious groups to maintain nonprofit status and respect the general public order. It also permits religious groups to establish places of worship and train clergy.

Nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. Upon submission, the justice ministry issues a provisional approval, and within six months, a permanent approval. At the end of this six-month period and regardless of whether or not the ministry issued its permanent approval, the group is considered registered and approved by the government. The government also requires foreign religious groups to obtain this approval.

Government Practices

Despite the registration requirement, unregistered domestic religious groups operated unhindered. Foreign religious groups generally operated without restriction after receiving approval from the government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met regularly with the government and major religious leaders.

In August the embassy co-hosted an iftar with Muslim groups. Over 100 people attended, including Muslims from the local and international communities, government officials, and members of other religious groups. Speakers and participants highlighted the warm relations and close partnerships among interfaith communities.

The embassy used social media to highlight religious freedom issues, including a post on a social media site on the August iftar. In March the embassy posted online excerpts of Secretary of State Kerry's first speech in which he underscored the importance of religious freedom.