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Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
October 2001



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 in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 774,200 square miles, and its population is approximately 12 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the country's population, with Roman Catholicism as the country's largest single denomination. The Roman Catholic Church claims 5 million adherents, but such figures could not be verified. The major Protestant denominations also are present, along with a number of indigenous African and Brazilian Christian denominations. The largest Protestant denominations include the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God. The largest syncretic religious group is the Kimbanguist Church, whose followers believe that a mid-20th century Congolese pastor named Joseph Kimbangu was a prophet. A small portion of the country's rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is a small Islamic community based around migrants from West Africa. There are a few atheists in the country.

In colonial times, the country's coastal populations primarily were Catholic while the Protestant mission groups were active in the interior. With the massive social displacement caused by 26 years of civil war, this rough division is no longer valid.

Foreign missionaries were very active prior to independence in 1975, although the Portuguese colonial authorities expelled many Protestant missionaries and closed mission stations based on the belief that the missionaries were inciting pro-independence sentiments. Missionaries have been able to return to the country since the early 1990's, although security conditions due to the civil war have made it impossible for them to return to most parts of the interior.

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 generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. Colonial era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from Angola; while those statutes still exist, they are no longer in effect. In March 2001, Minister Tjiplica announced that colonial-era law granting civil registration authority to the churches is to be put back into effect.

A Luanda Catholic FM radio station, Radio Ecclesia, broadcasts weekly several hours of church services and

overtly religious programming. State-owned television also broadcasts live Sunday morning Catholic Church services.

The post-independence Government was a one-party state until 1991 and had nationalized all church schools and clinics; however, since that time, all schools and clinics have been returned to the churches, and the Government permits churches and missions to start schools.

During a Catholic bishops' conference in March 2001, the Government asked the Catholic Church for assistance in implementing the Peace and Reconciliation Fund and for support in carrying out social programs in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Members of the clergy in government-held areas regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. There were unconfirmed reports that in May 2001, the state radio censored remarks made by the Archbishop of Lubango, Dom Zacarias Kamuenho, publicly criticizing both the Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) on behalf of the Catholic Church after a UNITA raid on the town of Caxito on May 5; however, the Government permitted Dom Zacharia's statement to be broadcast in full on Catholic Radio Ecclesia.

While in general the rebel group UNITA permitted freedom of religion, interviews with persons who left UNITA-controlled areas revealed that the clergy did not enjoy the right to criticize UNITA policies.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In January 1999, unknown gunmen killed Father Albino Saluaco, a Catholic parish priest, and two catechists in a town in the province of Huambo that was under UNITA military occupation. No group has claimed responsibility for the incident.

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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

There are amicable relations between the country's religious denominations, and there is a functioning ecumenical movement, particularly in support of peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Embassy officials and official visitors from the U.S. routinely meet with the country's religious leaders in the context of peacekeeping, democratization, development, and humanitarian relief efforts. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society movement and are consulted regularly by embassy officials. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, the Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and others, maintain an ongoing dialog with the leaderships of all of the country's religious denominations.

[End]

Released on October 26, 2001

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