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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - South Sudan

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
July 30, 2012

[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

The country became an independent republic on July 9. The report covers events that took place in the country from independence until the end of the year.

The Transitional Constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. Prior to independence from Sudan, the country had an autonomous government and an interim constitution that featured protections for religious freedom. Following independence, these protections are reflected in the Bill of Rights in the Transitional Constitution.

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

The U.S. government is committed to assisting the country in its efforts to achieve peace and security, including border and food security, good governance, economic growth, and respect for human rights and religious freedom. The U.S. government sought to promote religious freedom through routine discussions with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The majority of the country's eight million people are Christian. Data on the total number of Christians and other religious groups is difficult to obtain (the last national census in 2008 did not include religious demographics). The acting general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches named seven main denominations in the country, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Sudan Pentecostal, Sudan Interior, Presbyterian Evangelical, and the Inland African Church. The news editor for the Sudan Catholic Radio Network noted 60 independent African churches existed throughout the country. Independent churches tend to be small evangelical churches that developed after branching off from established churches. There are also small Muslim and African traditional religious populations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Transitional Constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The Transitional Constitution was ratified shortly before independence and signed into law by the president on July 9. Prior to the ratification of the Transitional Constitution, protections of religious freedoms were established in the interim constitution adopted after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the country and Sudan.

The Transitional Constitution states, "All religions shall be treated equally and religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes."

The Transitional Constitution provides the right to freedom of worship; the right to solicit and receive voluntary financial contributions; the right to own property for religious purposes; the right to write, issue and disseminate religious publications; the right to teach religion or beliefs in places suitable for these purposes; the right to train, appoint, and designate by succession one's own clergy; and the right to observe religious holidays.

The Transitional Constitution specifies the regulation of religious matters within each individual state as the executive and legislative responsibility of the state government, not the federal government.

The Transitional Constitution allows religious groups the right to establish and maintain appropriate faith-based, charitable, or humanitarian institutions. The government does not require religious groups to register. The government did not restrict the presence of foreign missionaries and does not require them to register.

The law states that public servants, officials, and employees cannot be discriminated against with respect to remuneration, terms, conditions, benefits, and privileges of services on grounds of religion.

Offices and businesses follow a Monday through Friday workweek, with Sunday as a day for religious observance. Schools in the South are in session on Friday, and Muslim students are not excused from class.

The government observes traditional Christian holidays, including Easter and Christmas, and some Islamic holy days, including Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom during the year. The government continued its practice to respect religious freedom as it had done prior to independence.

The government generally upheld constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and protected the rights of citizens to hold and manifest their religious beliefs.

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.

Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, and after the country gained independence, religious freedom has significantly improved. Members of different faiths have become more open and tolerant of each other's religions. For example, Christians marched along with Muslims on the streets of Juba during the Muslim celebration of Prophet Mohammed's birthday.

At most ceremonial public events, leaders from all major religious groups were present and prayers were read by Christian and Islamic leaders, with translation from English to Arabic often provided.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government promoted religious freedom routinely through discussions with government leaders, religious leaders, and civil society. In August, the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor conducted outreach with religious groups and encouraged respect for religious freedom with government officials and civil society organizations. The U.S. ambassador sought to promote religious

freedom through regular meetings with key religious leaders, such as the acting secretary general of the Sudan Council of Churches.