



Sierra Leone (44)

2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom:

Sierra Leone

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SIERRA LEONE

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

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

Both government policy and the generally amicable relationship among religions in the society contribute to the free practice of religion.

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. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government does not have requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

Religious Demography

Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available. However, most sources estimate that the population is 60 percent Muslim, 30 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of traditional indigenous religions.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south. However, the ongoing civil war has resulted in movement by major segments of the population.

According to sources, many syncretistic practices exist, with up to 20 percent of the population practicing a mixture of Muslim and traditional indigenous practices or Christian and traditional indigenous practices.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether they attend either Muslim- or Christian-oriented classes.

The Government has not taken any specific steps to promote interfaith understanding.

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

In the past, rebel forces have attacked both churches and mosques and targeted Christian and Muslim religious leaders. In particular, the rebels have targeted Roman Catholic priests and nuns largely on the assumption that the Church would pay ransom for their return and because troops from the Economic Organization (of West African States) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) used their missionary radio network in support of the Government. During the period covered by this report, some religious leaders were targeted by rebels for their peacekeeping activities as members of civil society, not because of their religion.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

There are amicable relations between the various religious communities, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process. The IRC criticizes the use of force and atrocities committed by the rebels, endorses reconciliation and peace talks, and facilitates rehabilitation of the victims affected by the war, including former child soldiers.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

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

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