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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. While some Muslim leaders continued to complain that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam because they prohibited the wearing of headscarves in school, others accepted that school officials do so to keep better track of their students. Some Protestant and Muslim groups continued to complain that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches and cemeteries.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, interreligious tension and criticism increased between followers of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, on the one hand, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, on the other. During the period covered by this report, there were at least two deadly clashes between Protestants and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. During the period covered by the previous report, there were also reports of clashes between Muslims and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

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 699,946 square miles, and its population is approximately 71 million. Approximately 40 to 45 percent of the population adhere to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC); however, the EOC claims 50 percent of the country's total population, or more than 31 million adherents, and 110,450 churches. The EOC is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara. Approximately 45 percent of the population is Muslim, although many Muslims claim that the actual percentage is higher. Islam is most prevalent in the Somali and Afar regions, as well as in parts of Oromia. Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism are the fastest growing faiths and constitute approximately 10 percent of the population. According to the Evangelical Church Fellowship, there are 7.4 million Protestants, although this figure may be a high estimate. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus and Kale Hiwot are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPRS), western and central Oromia, and in urban areas around the country. There are more than 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics, Jews, animists, and other practitioners of traditional indigenous religions make up most of the remaining population. There are very few atheists. Although precise data is not available, active participation in religious services is high throughout the country.

In Addis Ababa and western Gondar, in the Amhara region, there are very small concentrations of Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) and those who claim that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora).

A large number of foreign missionary groups operate in the country, including Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Protestant organizations, operating under the umbrella of the 12-member Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, sponsor or support missionary work: the Baptist Bible Fellowship; the New Covenant Baptist Church; the Baptist Evangelical Association; Mekane Yesus Church (associated with the Lutheran Church); Kale Hiwot Church (associated with SIM-Service in Mission); Hiwot Berhan Church (associated with the Swedish Philadelphia Church); Genet Church (associated with the Finnish Mission); Lutheran-Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia; Emnet Christos; Muluwongel (Full Gospel) Church; and Messerete Kristos (associated with the Mennonite Mission). There also is missionary activity among Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

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; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right. The Constitution requires the separation of religion and the state and prohibits a state religion, and the Government respects these rights in practice.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. Religious institutions, like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are registered with the Ministry of Justice and must renew their registration every year. Unlike NGOs, religious groups are not subject to a rigorous registration process. Under current law, any religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO. The Roman Catholic Nuncio in Ethiopia has written repeatedly to the Prime Minister's office seeking a reversal of this policy; however, there was no change in the government policy during the period covered by this report.

To register, each religious organization must complete an application form and submit a copy of its bylaws, a curriculum vitae of the organization's leader, and a copy of the leader's identity card. Failure to register results in the lack of any legal standing of the organization in the Government's eyes. For example, any organization that does not register with the Ministry of Justice would not be allowed to open a bank account and would be severely disadvantaged in any court of law.

However, the EOC has never registered and has never suffered ramifications for not registering. Similarly, the Supreme Islamic Council, after registering 8 years ago, has never reregistered since it protested this requirement to the Prime Minister's Office. Protests from other religious groups over these exceptions have not resulted in equal treatment from the Government.

Religious groups are not accorded duty-free status. Religious groups are given free government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries; however, schools and hospitals, regardless of how long they have been in operation, are subject to closure by the Government at any time, and the land taken back. Land used for prayer houses and cemeteries is protected from government reclamation, unless they were built illegally. Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. An interfaith effort to promote revision of the law in order for religious organizations to obtain duty-free status continued during the period covered by this report.

In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintains neutrality and tries to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders have requested the establishment of a federal institution to deal with religious groups. The Government considered the request; however, no action was taken to establish such a federal institution by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holidays, and continues to mandate a 2-hour lunch break on Fridays to allow Muslims to go to a mosque to pray. The Government also agreed to a request from Muslim students at Addis Ababa Commercial College to delay the start of afternoon classes until 1:30 p.m. to permit them to perform afternoon prayers at a nearby mosque.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans the formation of political parties based on religion.

The Government does not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they are attached to the development wing of a religious organization licensed by the Government. The Government requires religious organizations to separate their development activities from their religious ones and imposes different licensing processes for each. The Government is issuing licenses for religious organizations' development activities but not for its religious activities.

Under the press law, it is a crime to incite one religion against another. The press law also allows for defamation claims involving religious leaders to be prosecuted as criminal cases. In 2001 two journalists were detained and charged with defamation after writing articles critical of the EOC. Tilahun Bekele, publisher of Netsanet, was charged with libel against the pastor of the Kirkos Church, an EOC parish in the Addis Ababa diocese. Daniel Gezahegn, deputy editor-in-chief of Mogedwere, was arrested because of an article that was critical of the EOC and was accused of slandering Major-General Bacha DeBella, a government official. Both were released on bail in 2001; however, the charges against them were pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Evangelical leaders have complained of strict regulations on the importation of Bibles, as well as heavy customs duty on Bibles and other religious articles; however, Bibles and religious articles are subject to the

same customs duty as all imported books, donated or otherwise.

While some Muslim leaders continued to complain that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam because they prohibited the wearing of headscarves in school, others accepted that school officials do so to keep better track of their students. Certain public school teachers in the SNNPRS, Addis Ababa, and the Amhara region objected to Muslim schoolgirls covering their heads with scarves while at school. According to Muslim leaders, school officials negatively react to the practice of fully covering the face and hands of female students. Muslim leaders stated that in some schools, Muslim girls go without head coverings in order to avoid similar problems.

The Government has interpreted the constitutional provision for separation of religion and state to mean that religious instruction is not permitted in schools, whether they are public or private schools. Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical, and Muslim-owned and operated schools are not permitted to teach religion as a course of study. Most private schools teach morals courses as part of school curricula, and the Government Education Bureau in Addis Ababa has complained that such courses are not free of religious influence. Churches are permitted to have Sunday schools, the Koran is taught at mosques, and public schools permit the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

Minority religious groups have complained of discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Protestant groups occasionally complain that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders have complained that because they are perceived as "newcomers" they remain at a disadvantage compared with the EOC and the Supreme Islamic Council when it comes to the allocation of land. The Supreme Islamic Council has complained that it has more difficulty obtaining land from the government bureaucracy than the EOC; others believe that the Supreme Islamic Council is favored for mosque locations. While local authorities in the northern town of Axum, a holy city for the EOC, continued to deny Muslim leaders' repeated requests to allocate land for the construction of a mosque there, they have said that they will consider the request as soon as Saudi Arabian officials allow a church to be built in Mecca, a holy city for Muslims. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses have said that due to the lack of suitable plots in the capital that the Government was willing to allocate, they have leased their own.

In 1998 the Government returned Evangelical Church property that was seized under the Mengistu regime (including the Mekane Yesus Church headquarters, which served as Federal Police headquarters until 1997); however, the Government still has not returned other properties to the Mekane Yesus Church, including three student hostels and two schools. The Government also has not returned to the Seventh-day Adventists properties taken by the prior regime, including two hospitals. The Supreme Islamic Council continued to try to obtain properties that were confiscated outside of the capital under the Dergue regime. A March 2002 declaration by the Oromia Regional State Parliament called for the return of all nationalized property originally belonging to religious organizations; however, no property was returned by the end of the period covered by this report. Similar provisions were instituted in the Southern Region last year.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2002 Full Gospel Church members complained that district level officials in Merawi, Mecha district, West Gojam Zone, Amhara Region, refused to heed their warnings that Orthodox Church members were plotting to take violent measures against their members. The Full Gospel Church had been awarded a plot of land in Merawi over the objections of 42 Orthodox congregations. The failure of Mecha district officials to take action in response to the Full Gospel Church's concerns led to the July 2002 killing of a Full Gospel fellowship leader at the hands of an Orthodox mob (see Section III).

In April 2002, police arrested evangelical church leaders Kiros Meles and Ababayeh Desalegn as suspects in the killing of an Orthodox church member. The incident happened during a rampage by an Orthodox mob that attacked five evangelical churches in Maychew, Tigray region. Police apparently tried to suppress evidence linking the killing to a fellow police officer, who fired his gun in the air in a vain attempt to disperse the crowd. The two men were held for 1 year without any evidence being produced by the police. They were released in April 2003 without any charges ever filed against them.

In January 2001, in Harar, a riot broke out between Muslims and Christians (see Section III); the army was called in to restore order and reportedly shot and killed five persons. No action was taken against any of the army officers who were involved in the incident, and the case officially was closed.

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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, open conflict among religious groups increased during the period covered by this report. These occurred most noticeably between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and evangelical Protestants, and between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims. In addition there continued to be pockets of interreligious tension and criticism among some religious groups. For example, members of newer faiths, such as Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, have encountered overt opposition from the public. Muslims and Orthodox Christians complain about proselytization by Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses. Ethiopian Orthodox leaders complain that sometimes Protestants fail to respect Orthodox holy days and Orthodox customs. Muslims complain that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their services. There were complaints by Muslim leaders that the EOC's desire to "show supremacy" sometimes caused irritation in the regions.

In most sections of the country, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respect each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas, most notably in Welo, in the Amhara region, as well as in urban areas throughout the country. In the capital, Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths often lived side-by-side. Most urban areas reflect a mixture of all religious denominations. The Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestant denominations, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church and Kale Hiwot Churches, provided social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members. However, there were some clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians over the allocation of land during the period covered by this report.

On April 26, on the evening of Ethiopian Orthodox Holy Saturday, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in the District 28, Ward 4 area of Addis Ababa attacked members of the local Islamic council and destroyed a fence surrounding a plot of land upon which a mosque was to be built. Several persons were injured; at least one Islamic council member was hospitalized for several weeks. Fighting continued for three nights but paused during daytime hours. Police initially reported to the scene of the fighting but left after not witnessing any fighting during daytime hours.

On January 13, a confrontation erupted in the Merkato area of Addis Ababa between Muslims and city officials who had come to demolish an illegally constructed mosque. Muslims defied the authorities' right to tear down the mosque and threw rocks at city and police officials. Police fired into the air, but there were no reported deaths. Police seriously beat at least one man. City officials demolished the mosque and had plans to carry out other demolitions of illegally constructed mosques around the city.

On January 9, a clash occurred during a celebration of Ethiopian Epiphany attended by the Patriarch at Yeka Michael church in Addis Ababa. Many Orthodox followers attending the celebration were beaten up and others imprisoned by police forces when they burned a picture of the Patriarch and started throwing rocks at him.

On December 29, 2002, Orthodox followers clashed with Mekane Yesus Protestant followers in Mekelle, Tigray region. Mekane Yesus Orthodox followers were in the third day of a 3-day open-air prayer service at Mekelle stadium for drought victims. Orthodox religious services underway at nearby St. George Church involved the use of loudspeakers (a common practice of Ethiopian Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim preachers alike) apparently disturbing the Protestant service. A visit by a Mekane Yesus pastor to St. George Church asking them to lower the noise level was unsuccessful. That afternoon, Orthodox followers approached the stadium and began throwing rocks at Mekane Yesus followers taking part in the service. Regional police arrived on the scene but were unable to control the crowd, even after firing shots in the air. Those shots, when heard by others in the surrounding area, caused the crowd to swell. Police shot and killed two men on the spot. Police severely beat a third man, who died 3 days later in a hospital. Several hundred people were wounded in the fighting. Police detained dozens of individuals, all of whom were released a few days after the incident. The violence took on a political nature when the offices of the ruling party-owned Walta Information Center and the Ethiopian News Agency came under attack. Orthodox crowd members also smashed the windows of buildings in the Jehovah Witnesses' compound in Mekelle. No punitive action has been taken against the police officers responsible for the deaths of the three individuals.

On December 24, 2002, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians opposed to the proposed construction of a mosque in the Ayer Tena neighborhood of Addis Ababa clashed with Muslims there. Several persons were injured.

On November 18 and December 27, 2002, confrontations between members of Lideta Maryam Orthodox Parish in Addis Ababa and Ethiopian Orthodox Church officials over alleged corruption by church officials appointed by the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church turned violent when police raided the church compound and forcibly dispersed members of the congregation who were assembled in prayer. Police killed one man and injured dozens. According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), police indiscriminately beat many persons in the compound, including nuns, monks, elderly women, and other bystanders. A Federal Police officer severely beat Voice of America journalist Helen Mohammed when she tried to gain access to the Lideta Church compound on December 27. Police also beat Tobia reporter

Yonas Wolde Senbet and confiscated his camera at the church. According to EHRCO, after the raid, police detained approximately 700 persons at Kolfe police training camp and subjected them to physical abuse. Many complained they were doused with water, forced to crawl naked on gravel, and denied food and water for most of the 5 days they were in detention. Police required them to sign statements under duress admitting to their roles in inciting riots at the church before they could be released. All 700 members have reportedly been released.

In October 2002, leaders of the Southern Region Islamic Council complained of the intention of district level authorities in Bonke district, Gamo Gofa Zone in the Southern Region, to demolish a 45-year-old mosque that lies in the heart of the town's business district, ostensibly in order to make room for more small businesses. If carried out, this would contravene Ethiopian law, which has a grandfather clause that protects such religious buildings. When one of the Islamic Council leaders traveled to Bonke district in September 2002 to videotape the mosque, Bonke district officials had him arrested and charged with "illegal photography." He was released from detention after 3 days. Islamic Council officials alleged that local officials were discriminating against Muslim residents of Bonke district not only on religious grounds but also on racial grounds, as most Muslims living in Bonke are not originally from there. The mosque had not been demolished by the end of the period covered by this report.

On July 17, 2002, a Full Gospel Church fellowship leader named Dantew was killed in his home in Merawi, in the Amhara region, in front of his family by a mob of Orthodox Church priests and other adherents wielding machetes and axes. He was left to bleed to death from axe wounds to his head. Eight others were seriously injured. The crowd was angry over the Full Gospel Church's plans to build a church on a plot of land awarded it by the Government. Forty-one persons were detained in connection with the killing; all have been released except one. It is unclear whether charges have been filed against the one person still being held in connection with the killing.

On January 19, 2002, in Kemisse, the capital of the Oromiya Zone, in the Amhara Region, one person was killed during a clash between Muslims and Christians. According to police reports, they arrested several persons for organizing the disruption or throwing rocks at the procession celebrating the Ethiopian Orthodox holiday of Timket or Epiphany; however, all of those arrested subsequently were released. There was still no determination of who was responsible for the killing.

In December 2001, in Addis Ababa, Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians fought over a parcel of land that both groups claimed to be their own. The disputed parcel originally was allocated to the Muslim community; however, no permission was given to construct a mosque on the property. After 2 years, the Muslim community began constructing the mosque at night without permission, which led to clashes with local members of the EOC. According to reports from the Islamic Affairs Council, 2 Muslims were killed during those clashes, and police arrested an estimated 100 persons. All of those arrested subsequently were released, and construction of the mosque did not resume by the end of the period covered by this report.

In November 2001, in Addis Ababa, Muslims and Orthodox Christians began fighting after Christians in the community requested that the Muslim community demolish a mosque being built without a permit on a small soccer field. One person was killed, several persons were injured, and several persons were arrested. No further action was taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2001, in Addis Ababa, police ordered a group of Muslims to stop the construction of an unauthorized mosque near an Ethiopian Orthodox church. Fighting began after Orthodox Christians attempted to dismantle the mosque. Construction at the site did not resume by the end of the period covered by this report.

In January 2001, in Harar, a riot broke out between Muslims and Christians after several members of a Christian procession entered a mosque and disrupted Muslim services. Both groups accused each other of destroying religious property. After the local police no longer were able to control the rioting, the army was called in to restore order and reportedly shot and killed five persons; it was not known whether the rioters fired weapons in return. No actions were taken against any of the army officers who were involved in the incident, and the case officially was closed.

The Islamic Affairs Council estimated that 100 mosques were burned in the Oromiya Region during the last 3 years, many by followers of Wahabbist Islam. The Islamic Council continued to investigate the fires at the end of the period covered by this report. Although the identities of those responsible are unknown or not released publicly, 12 executive members of the Oromiya branch of the Supreme Islamic Council were removed from their positions for not stopping the destruction of mosques in the region.

Leaders of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) struggled with Wahhabist fundamentalism within their ranks during the period covered by this report. The growing influence of radical elements within Islamic communities in the country, aided by funding from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for mosque construction and social services, continued to concern the EIASC.

In February 2002, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the chairman of the EIASC, the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Church, and the president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus met with their Eritrean counterparts and officials from the Eritrean Foreign Ministry in Eritrea. The religious leaders then traveled to Ethiopia to continue their discussions. They issued statements appealing for peace and reconciliation between the two countries.

Section IV. 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. The U.S. Embassy met with government officials regularly to discuss religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy is also encouraging the Government to expedite the registration process for religious organizations to make sure no religious groups are channeling funds through the country to finance terrorist aims. U.S. Embassy officials also made an active effort to visit all of the religious groups and religious NGOs during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Ambassador continued to hold regular meetings with religious leaders to promote HIV/AIDS awareness. In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continued to work with the Ethiopian Orthodox Development Assistance Authority to provide food commodities and grants to support food security programs in four areas. USAID supported a variety of programs through Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, and Family Health International. USAID continued to work with the EOC and Mekane Yesus Church, as well as with the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church and the Missionaries of Charity Sisters, to support HIV/AIDS programs.

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