



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

2002/71811-14
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Burundi

International Religious Freedom Report 2002
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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The Transitional Constitutional Act provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The leader of an indigenous religious group who was arrested in 2001 for security reasons was acquitted and released, and his church was reopened.

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 10,745 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.2 million. Although reliable statistics on the number of followers of various religions are not available, a Roman Catholic official has estimated that 60 percent of the population is Catholic, with the largest concentration of adherents located in the center and south of the country. A Muslim leader has estimated that up to 10 percent of the population is Muslim, mostly in urban areas. The remainder of the population belongs to other Christian churches, practices traditional indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of small indigenous groups not affiliated with any major religion, some of which have won adherents by promising miracle cures for HIV/AIDS and other ailments. Many citizens regularly attend religious services.

Foreign missionary groups of many faiths are active in the country, including Baha'is, Baptists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, the Society of Friends, and Seventh-Day Adventists.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Transitional Constitutional Act provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

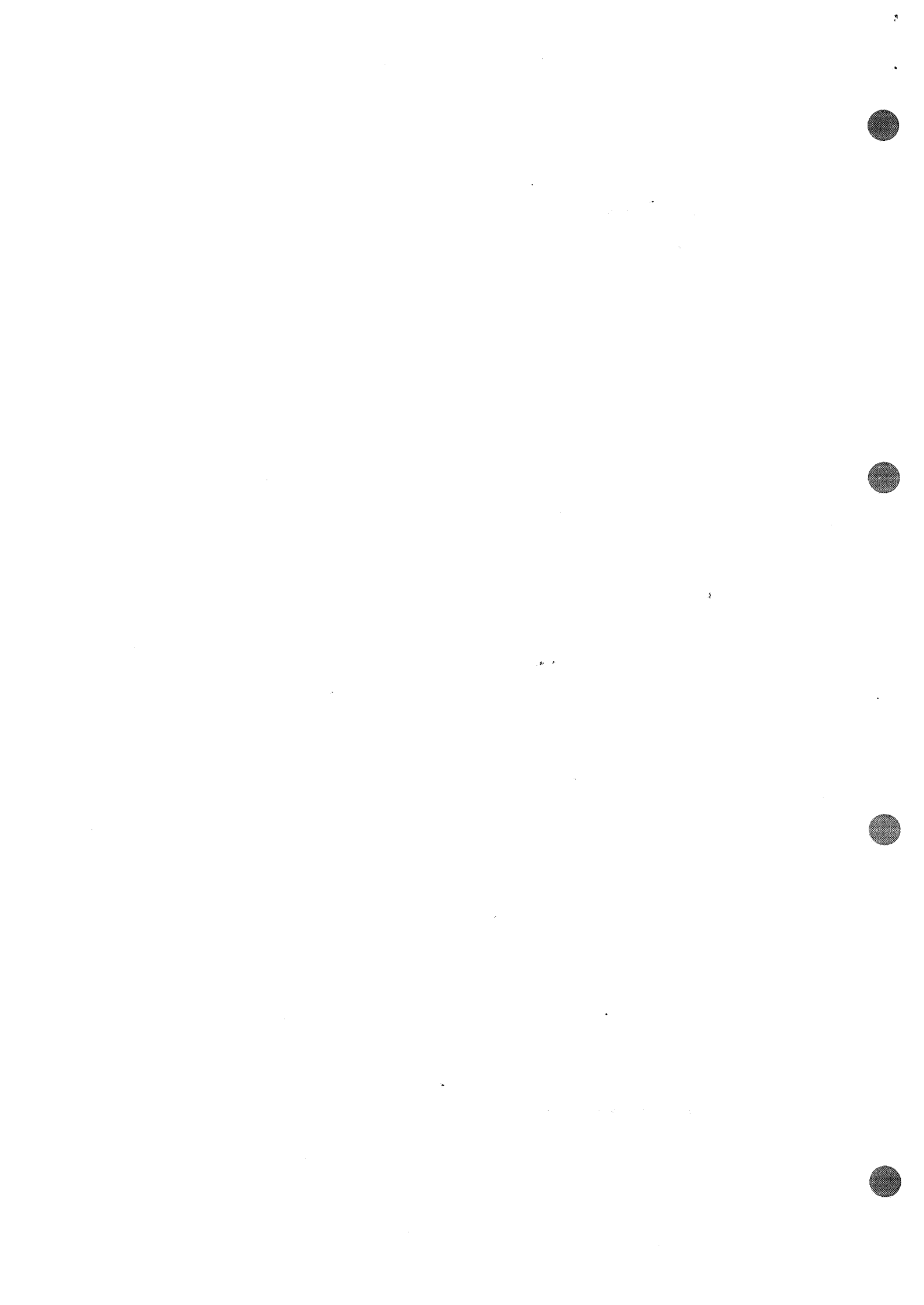
The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which monitors their leadership and activities. The Government requires that religious groups maintain a headquarters in the country. While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Government often waives taxes on imported religious articles used by churches and also often waives taxes on the importation by churches of goods destined for social development purposes. These exemptions are negotiated with the Finance Ministry on a case-by-case basis, and there is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

The heads of major religious organizations are accorded diplomatic status. Foreign missionary groups openly promote their religious beliefs. The Government has welcomed their development assistance.

The Government recognizes religious holidays that primarily are Catholic, including the Assumption, the Ascension, and All Saint's Day, as well as Christmas.

On April 22, 2002, members of the Bujumbura Muslim community wrote a letter of complaint to the Interior Minister regarding alleged fraud in recent mosque elections. The Government opened an investigation; however, no action was taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom



Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; one religious leader was tried and acquitted during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In April 2001, the Government arrested the leader of an indigenous religious group and closed down his church after the leader's claims to divinity led to repeated clashes with a rival leader's adherents. The Government claimed to be motivated by concern for public order rather than religious bias. The trial was held during the period covered by this report; the leader was acquitted and released, and his church was reopened. There were no other cases of clergy being arrested and tried or churches being closed during the period covered by this report.

On May 18, 2002, rebels from the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) kidnaped Ruyigi Catholic Diocese Bishop Joseph Nduhirubusa and killed two of his guards; the Bishop was released unharmed on May 23, 2002. The motivation of the rebels, who reportedly sought to demonstrate that the Government was ineffective in protecting its citizens, was believed to be political, rather than religious.

On June 11, 2001, rebels killed one nun in the area of Mutambara in an ambush on a vehicle belonging to the Roman Catholic bishop of Bururi. On June 9, 2001, FDD rebels killed Anglican archdeacon Jodi Beheda and two other persons in an ambush on their van near Makamba. Robbery was believed to be the sole motive of both attacks. No action was taken against the responsible members of the rebel forces by the end of the period covered by this report.

On October 3, 2000, soldiers shot and killed Antonio Bargiggia, a Catholic brother from Italy, who ran a hospital in Mutoyi. On October 19, 2000, a soldier, Napoleon Manirakiza, was convicted of killing Bargiggia and was executed; Manirakiza was denied both legal representation during his trial and the right to appeal his conviction.

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. Disputes between religious groups are rare, apart from minor disagreements over competition for followers.

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. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of the various religious communities.

Released on October 7, 2002

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13808pf.htm)

