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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government imposed some restrictions.

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; however, local authorities banned some churches suspected of being "cults" and also some nighttime religious meetings for security reasons. During the reporting period, no members of religious groups under suspicion of being "cults" were arrested or detained for illegal assembly and public nuisance.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were isolated cases of tension between Muslims and Evangelical Christians over the issue of slaughtering animals for public sale. Additionally, the backlash from the killing of more than 1,000 citizens in 2000 at the hands of a religious group continued to result in negative public attitudes toward some Christian groups that are viewed as "cults."

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights and sponsors efforts to promote dialog and harmony among religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 146,556 square miles, and its population is approximately 24.6 million. Christianity is the majority religion, and its adherents constitute approximately 66 percent of the population. Muslims account for approximately 16 percent of the population. A variety of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Judaism, are practiced freely and, combined, make up about 18 percent of the population. Among the Christian groups, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches claim approximately the same number of followers, accounting for perhaps 90 percent of the nation's professed Christians. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptist Church, the Unification Church, and the Pentecostal Church, among others, are active. Muslims are mainly Sunni, although there also are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also are represented among the Asian community. There are few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions tend to be syncretistic. Deeply held traditional indigenous beliefs commonly are blended into established religious rites or observed alongside such rites, particularly in areas that are predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several denominations are present and active in the country, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Episcopal Church/Church of Uganda, the Church of Christ, and the 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, the Government imposed some restrictions.

All indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Interior Ministry, which regulates and oversees NGO services. Failure to register is a criminal offence. A harsher new NGO Registration Amendment Bill was introduced

in 2001 and is currently being discussed by Parliament.

To register, each organization must submit the following documents to the NGO Board:

1) A registration form for the organization signed by two promoters providing the organization's name, its objectives, class of persons to whom membership is open, membership, titles of organization officers and their addresses, the organization's source of funding, property owned by the organization, and any privileges, immunities, or exemptions requested by the organization; 2) A recommendation letter endorsed by the three chairmen of the local government structures and the Resident District Commissioner; 3) Two letters of recommendation by guarantors/references of the organization; 4) A budget and work plan of activities to be carried out during the first year of operation; 5) Two copies of the organization's Constitution or By-laws; and 6) An organizational chart of the leadership and a letter specifying the district of operation.

The Government continued to refuse to grant registration to the World Last Message Warning Church, an apocalyptic group under suspicion following the 2000 killings of more than 1,000 citizens; however, in February 2002, criminal charges against the group's leader were dropped for lack of evidence. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such registration to any other religious organization.

The Political Organizations Act, which was implemented in June 2002, imposes restrictions on the registration and organization of political parties and organizations; it precludes the formation of such entities if membership is based exclusively on sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribal birth, creed, or religion.

Missionary groups face no restrictions on their activity. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

In November 2002, a working group of national intelligence agencies recommended that churches and other religious organizations be required to submit their working programs to district security chiefs for monitoring. This recommendation has not been implemented and still is being discussed by the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee.

Permits also are necessary for the construction of facilities, including religious facilities. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such permits to any religious organization.

Private Koranic and Christian schools are common. There is no religious instruction in public schools.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days appropriate to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holidays celebrated as national holidays include, Eid al-Adha, Eid-al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Some local governments have restricted the hours of operation of religious organizations that are viewed as "cults." On February 6, Kampala law enforcement personnel closed the Liberty Worship Center after nearby business owners complained of noise during lunch hours. The church remained closed as of the end of this reporting period. On December 8, 2002, Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) soldiers and members of the Local Defense Force in Hoima District raided the Revival Christian Center, in response to neighboring residents' complaints that noisy night prayers were disturbing the peace. Soldiers allegedly assaulted worshippers, but the church was allowed to remain open.

On May 27, police in Sembabule District closed Prophetess Nabaasa Gwajwa's "cult" in Ntuusi village and evicted her followers. Since the group had not registered with the Uganda Herbalists Associations, the Inspector General of Police ordered its closure. Though no one was arrested at the time of eviction, 204 Gwajwa followers were later taken into custody on charges of being disorderly when they camped in protest outside the district police headquarters. In early June, 128 of those arrested were set free. The other 76 persons detained were still in custody at the end of the period covered by this report.

On May 29, Kampala Mayor John Sebaana Kizito announced that poorly constructed churches and mosques, which pose a public safety hazard, as well as those religious buildings without approved building plans, would be demolished. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Kampala City Council had not yet completed a survey of the condition of mosques and churches around the city.

On June 22, the police raided the offices of the Soroti Catholic Diocese Integrated Development Organization and stopped all broadcasts of the Catholic Church-owned Radio Kyoga Veritas FM. The

station was closed for airing reports about fighting in the region between government forces and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

In October 2002, local authorities in Jinja District banned a religious radio program due to its alleged inflammatory nature. Angry Muslims had complained that Besweri Kaswabuli, leader of the controversial religious group "Isa Masiya," was using the Sunday radio program to desecrate the Muslim faith.

There were no developments in two cases in which local authorities closed religious institutions for forbidding members from seeking medical treatment. The leader and members of the religious group "Jurwo Ni Mungu" (Believers in God), arrested in March 2002 for unlawful assembly, are still in prison awaiting trial. The United Methodist Church of Jinja, which was also shut down in 2000 following allegations that it forbade members from seeking medical treatment, remained closed during the period covered by this report.

There were reports that local officials dispersed meetings of religious groups during the period covered by this report. In December 2002, police in Hoima District banned overnight prayers on the grounds that they posed a threat to security. On December 24, 2002, security operatives in Luwero District barred followers of the self-styled prophet, Wilson Bushara, from holding a party in honor of the leader's release from prison.

Several religious groups, which had been shut down by police as suspected "cults" in previous years, remained closed during this reporting period. These include Pastor Stephen Wandera's Pentecostal Revival Church, which was shut down in 2001, as well as the Revival Pentecostal Church in Kasangati, the Hima Public School church group in Busongora, and the Church of the Servants of the Eucharistic Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Bushenyi, which were closed in 2000.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports that authorities arrested members of religious groups during the period covered by this report; however, district officials harassed some members of the Catholic Church in Rukungiri and Kabale, labeling them "anti-government."

In February, the Archbishop of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uganda, Dr. John Wani, petitioned the Government to forbid institutions of higher learning from holding exams on days of worship. Many Seventh-day Adventist students had reportedly missed exams held on Saturdays. There was no government response to this request during the period covered by this report, and exams continue to be held on Saturdays.

On March 21, 2002, Father Michael Declan O'Toole, an Irish Catholic priest, and two other persons were shot and killed at a military roadblock in Kotido District. On March 23, two soldiers were charged with the killings, and on March 26, they were tried by a court martial tribunal and executed; neither was afforded the right of appeal. The motivation for the killing of Father O'Toole, who frequently criticized the conduct of security forces in the area, was believed to be criminal, rather than religious.

There were no developments in the case of the 12 followers of the Katula Kebise religious group who had been arrested in March 2002 on charges of being disorderly.

On July 12, 2002, a Kampala Court acquitted 15 Tabliq Muslims, who had been facing treason charges dating from 1995; however, 7 of them were rearrested on the same day by the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force on charges of treason. Some members of the group maintain that they are being held for religious reasons.

On July 24, 2002, a Kampala Court sentenced five members of the "Ndawula" religious group to a fine of \$111 (200,000 Ugandan Shillings) or 6 months in jail for "managing an unlawful society." They had been arrested along with many other group members in December 2001 in Wakiso District. Police released the other 88 followers after clearing them of criminal liability.

There were no reports that security forces harassed Muslims; however, there were allegations of insensitivity toward Muslim students in government schools. In November 2002, the Secretary to the Uganda National Examination Board reportedly advised Muslim seventh grade primary students not to fast while taking exams, despite the fact that exams fell during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Police are still searching for 5 key members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, including leader Joseph Kibwetere, in relation to the 2000 killing in Kanungu of over 500 members of the group. During the period covered by this report, the Commission of Inquiry remained unable to complete its work because of a lack of funding. There were no developments in the case of Rev. Francis Mutanzindwa, the former Assistant Resident District Commissioner (RDC) of

Rukungiri, who had failed to act upon information about the activities of the group.

During the period covered by this report, there were no developments in the three 2000 court cases involving "cult" related charges against the leader of the Jesus Christ the King of Salvation Church, five members of the Kisaaba Redeemed Church, and five members of the Mulungimu Full Gospel Church.

The LRA was also responsible for abuses, including attacks on religious leaders and multiple incidents involving the destruction and theft of church property. The Government of Uganda is attempting to stop the LRA insurgency through a combination of military action against the LRA, the provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender, and offers of peace talks.

On April 25, LRA rebels abducted Father Gabriel Durigon, an Italian parish priest, when they attacked Gulu Cathedral, the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Northern Uganda.

On May 11, LRA rebels abducted 44 young seminarians from the Sacred Heart Minor Seminary in Lacor, Gulu District. Four of the students were later rescued in a battle in Pader District. Seven others were reportedly killed.

On June 6, LRA rebels abducted Father Alex Ojera, a parish priest of Alito Catholic Mission in Apac District along with 16 children. Fr. Ojera was released shortly thereafter, but no information is available on the abducted children.

On June 12, LRA leader Joseph Kony reportedly ordered all his troops to destroy church missions and kill all priests in Northern Uganda. The Monitor newspaper quoted Kony on June 16 speaking on local radio as saying "Catholic missions must be destroyed, priests and all missionaries killed in cold blood and nuns beaten black and blue."

On September 14, 2002, LRA rebels overran a military detachment in Opit and then the Opit Catholic mission where they abducted two Comboni missionaries, Fathers Ponziano Velluto and Alex Pizzi. The two priests were released after 12 hours. The rebels stole communications equipment from the Mission.

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, there were limited instances of tension between Muslims and Evangelical Christians in Pallisa, Masaka, Kamuli, Iganga, and Kabale. In one case, a group of Tabliq Muslims assaulted an Evangelical Christian in the Kampala suburb of Bwaise after he reportedly stepped on the Koran during a religious argument. In another series of incidents, police had to increase security after Tabliq Muslims threatened to attack Christian butchers in a dispute over the public slaughter of animals. Traditionally public butchers in Uganda are Muslims who slaughter animals according to Islamic tradition. Recently, Christian groups have demanded the right to butcher and sell meat. An on-going Christian-Muslim dialog helped resolve the dispute peacefully.

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances including the Inter-Religious Council, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Inter-Religious Program continued efforts to ease religious tensions and find lasting solutions to civil unrest and the insurgency in Northern Uganda.

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. The Ambassador and other U.S. Government and Embassy officials met with leaders of various religions during the period covered by this report. The Embassy has supported with small grants organizations that promote inter-religious harmony through dialog.

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