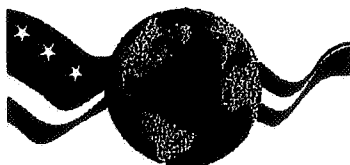


Uganda (56)

94



[Print Friendly Version]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Archive](#) | [Search](#)[About the State Department](#) | [Press & Public Affairs](#) | [Travel & Living Abroad](#)
[Countries & Regions](#) | [International Topics & Issues](#) | [History, Education & Culture](#)
[Business Center](#) | [Other Services](#) | [Employment](#)

Uganda

International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
October 2001

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

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, on one occasion local officials forcibly disbanded a church group. Several religious organizations that were disbanded forcibly in April and May 2000 after members of a religious group killed over 1,000 citizens remained disbanded at the end of the period covered by this report. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that security officials harassed or detained Muslims.

There are amicable relations between the various religious communities, and no religious group actively impinges upon the rights of others to worship; however, the backlash from the killing of over 1,000 citizens in the spring of 2000 at the hands of a religious group resulted in negative public attitudes toward 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.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 146,556 square miles, and its population is approximately 23 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 95 percent of the nation's professed Christians. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), 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, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Muslims and adherents of other minority religions occupy positions of authority in local and central government.

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, there were some restrictions.

All religious organizations are required to register with the Nongovernmental Organizations Board. The Government continued to refuse to grant registration to the World Last Message Warning Church, due to its leader's pending criminal charges and continuing suspicions following the 2000 cult killings of over 1,000 citizens. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such registration to any other religious organization.

Missionary groups face no particular restrictions on their activity. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

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.

On February 7, 2001, the Electoral Commission announced that the date of the presidential election would be moved from March 6 to March 7 because of the Muslim Eid holiday on March 6; the date later was changed to March 12 due to problems with voter registration.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

On August 16, 2000, the Jinja Resident District Commissioner ordered the closure of the United Methodist Church in Jinja Town following allegations that the church forbade members from seeking medical treatment. On August 13, 2000, a church member suffering from asthma died, reportedly after 3 days of fasting and refusing medication.

Some local governments have restricted the hours of operations of religious organizations that are viewed as cults, for example, prohibiting nighttime prayer meetings. The Government largely has ignored calls for these churches to be shut down and their followers returned to mainstream churches. However, in the wake of discoveries in March, April, and May 2000 that over 1,000 citizens had been killed by members of a religious group, several religious organizations were disbanded forcibly. In early April 2000, following allegations that the Revival Pentecostal Church in Nseko village, Kasangati, allowed youths to engage in sexual relationships, the deputy Resident District Commissioner (RDC) closed the church. In mid-April 2000, police in Kasese district banned the activities of a church group based in Hima public school, Busongora. On May 19, 2000, the Bushenyi resident district commissioner ordered the closure of the Church of the Servants of the Eucharistic Hearts of Jesus and Mary, which allegedly was operating in the guise of a vocational school. None of these churches were reopened by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government continued to refuse to grant registration to the World Last Message Warning Church, due to its leader's pending criminal charges and continuing suspicions following the 2000 cult killings of over 1,000 citizens.

Unlike in the first half of 2000, there were no reports during the period covered by this report that local officials dispersed meetings of religious groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In August 2000, police in Rukungiri district arrested Innocent Bitungwabariho, a leader of the Jesus Christ the King of Salvation church. Bitungwabariho allegedly confined his family to their house for 5 years in order to prevent them from being exposed to sin. On August 22, he appeared before court in Rukungiri district on charges of participating in an unlawful assembly, being idle and disorderly, and child neglect under section 15, sub-section (1) of the Penal Code Act. Bitungwabariho remained in detention, and his case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

On August 7, 2000, Nabi Besweri Kiswabuli, the apostle of the Issa Massiya religious group in Iganga district, was charged with assaulting and injuring Daniel Tusubira, a former follower. The alleged assault occurred on March 2, 1999, in Bubaga village, Busiki county. Kiswabuli and others reportedly attacked Tusubira when he returned to Massiya Camp to retrieve his belongings. The case was pending in court at the end of the period covered by this report.

On July 18, 2000, Wilson Bushara, leader of the World Last Message Warning Church, and 17 of his followers were arrested and charged with defilement, rape, abduction, and theft. The group reportedly defiled and raped a 15-year-old girl between August and September 18, 1999. On November 23, 2000, the Director of Public Prosecutions ordered that Bushara and his followers be transferred from the Buganda Magistrates' Court to Luweero where the offenses allegedly were committed. On May 13, 2001, the Kampala High Court dismissed the charge of defilement against Bushara due to lack of evidence; however, the other charges and cases against his followers were pending before the Luweero district Magistrates' Court at the end of the period covered by this report.

Following the killings on March 16, 2000, of more than 500 followers of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God and the discovery of mass graves of approximately 500 other persons on properties in Kanungu belonging to the group, the Government launched investigations of numerous religious groups. Three groups were disbanded forcibly and one religious leader was arrested. On March 29, 2000, former Rukungiri Assistant Resident District Commissioner (ARDC) Rev. Francis Mutazindwa was arrested for failing to act on information about the activities of the Kanungu cult while he was the ARDC. He was

released on bond on April 29, 2000, pending further investigation. In December 2000, the Government appointed a commission of inquiry to investigate the Kanungu killings and the operation of other religious-based NGO's; however, due to the Ministry of Internal Affairs' lack of funds, the Commission's investigation has been delayed.

As of the end of the period covered by this report, 38 members of the Islamic Tabliq group who were arrested in 1995 on treason charges remained in detention pending trial. The Government maintains that the group members are terrorists, but some members have said that they are held for religious reasons. The group was offered amnesty under a law signed in January 2000; however, the 38 members refused amnesty and chose to stand trial. Under the amnesty, 28 other Tabliq Muslims arrested on the same charges were pardoned and released in 2000.

There were no developments in the May 2000 case involving five members of the Kisaaba Redeemed Church in Kayunga, Mukono district—Benon Kaye, Monica Isabirye, Eseza Kisakye Lukwago, Catherine Nagujja, and Willinstone Nagenda—who were arrested and charged with causing the death of a church member by denying him medical treatment. Kaye and Isabirye were released on bail, and the other members were freed.

There were no developments in the May 2000 case involving five members of the Mulungiomu Full Gospel Church in Luweero—John Mwebaza, Florence Mirembe, Fred Mwesigwa, Sarah Mugabi, and Geoffrey Beyongera—who were arrested after reportedly telling their followers to fast and sell their property. The five remained in custody at Luzira prison at the end of the period covered by this report.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that security officials harassed or detained Muslims.

Although there have been reports from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that some Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) troops may have targeted Catholic clergy, subsequent reports from the DRC indicate that UPDF troops were not involved in such incidents.

On October 1, 2000, in Aruu county, Kitgum district, LRA rebels ambushed and killed Father Raffaele di Bari, an Italian Roman Catholic priest, as he traveled on a road southwest of Kitgum. Bari was the parish priest of Pajule Catholic Church and had lived in the country since 1959. Bari was not targeted because he was a priest.

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

There are amicable relations between the various religious communities, and no religious group actively impinges upon the right of others to worship. However, the backlash from the spring 2000 killing of over 1,000 citizens at the hands of a religious group resulted in negative public attitudes toward fringe Christian groups. Some officials of "mainstream" Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious organizations have called for the closure of Christian churches, which are viewed as cults.

Early in 2001, the heads of the Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and Islamic faiths organized an Inter-Religious Council; however, the organization's structure had not been determined by the end of the period covered by this report. The purpose of the organization is to strengthen inter-religious dialogue among the main religious groups and to advocate on social issues of concern to all groups.

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.

[End]

Released on October 26, 2001

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)

This site is managed by the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

