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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Burundi

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
July 30, 2012

[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government encouraged the government and societal leaders to continue to support the broad-based religious tolerance observed in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

Although reliable statistics on the size of various religious groups are not available, sources estimate approximately 60 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 20 percent includes members of indigenous religious groups, and 15 percent is Protestant. The Muslim population is estimated to be between 2 and 5 percent, the majority of whom live in urban areas. Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims; the remainder is Shia.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited.

A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies. The government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association of a religious nature

must provide the denomination or affiliation of the institution, a copy of its bylaws, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. It usually takes between two and four weeks for the ministry to process a registration request. A representative of a religious institution can be jailed for six months to five years for failing to comply with these instructions.

While no law accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Ministry of Finance often negotiates waivers of taxes on religious articles or goods imported by religious institutions that were destined for social development purposes. There was no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ascension Day, the Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha (Eid al-Qurban), All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Although all religious groups must register with the Ministry of Interior, during the year the ministry did not refuse any requests for registration nor did it penalize a representative of any religious group for non-compliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion is interwoven into the fabric of society, with freedom of religion as a guiding principle firmly in place. Members of different faiths live and work together without issue.

The current government administration is a mixture of Christian and Muslim officials. The president is a Christian, while several prominent members of his cabinet are Muslim. Even though the majority of the country is Christian, there are areas where there are higher proportions of Muslims. The two faiths interact without friction.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government supported religious freedom, and encouraged the country to sustain the status quo whenever possible. The embassy established and sustained communications with religious leaders and encouraged Christian and Muslim groups to meet together to exchange views and enhance the ecumenical dialogue.
