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2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Sierra Leone

[Covers the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009]

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There was one report of societal abuse based on religious affiliation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles and a population of 6.4 million. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) estimates that 60 percent of the population is Muslim, 20 to 30 percent Christian, and 5 to 10 percent practitioners of indigenous and other religious beliefs, mostly animist. There are small numbers of Baha'is, Hindus, and Jews.

Evangelicals are a growing minority in the Christian community. Many citizens practice a mixture of Islam or Christianity with traditional indigenous religious beliefs.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially ended in 2002, resulted in movement between regions by large segments of the population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in all schools. Students may choose whether to attend the religious knowledge classes that the schools offer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was one report of societal abuse based on religious affiliation.

On April 29, 2009, persons who claimed to be acting on the orders of an unidentified imam burned a church in the village of Rogbon in Kambia Province, reportedly in response to the razing of the abandoned mosque that had previously occupied the site. No one was injured.

A government task force, which included government ministers, religious leaders, and observers from the diplomatic community, visited the church site, heard testimony from villagers, and interviewed stakeholders. A separate criminal investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The IRC, composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, played a vital role in civil society and actively participated in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. Evangelical Christians have a separate communal organization, the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone. Previous membership applications from Baha'i and Jewish communities to the IRC lapsed during the reporting period.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.
