

**Burundi**

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International Religious Freedom Report 2003

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The Transitional Constitutional Act, promulgated in October 2001, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Act does not provide for any official state religion, and discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited.

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 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 6.3 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, a majority of whom lives 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. A good proportion of persons who have access to formal religious services attend them.

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, promulgated in October 2001, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice, within the bounds of public order and the law. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. During the year a new bill specifically guaranteeing religious freedom and detailing the registration and regulation of religious organizations was drafted by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security; however, the bill had not been presented to the Council of Ministers by the end of the period covered by this report.

There is no state religion. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. Each association with a religious nature must file the following with the Ministry: the denomination of the religious institution or affiliation, a copy of its statutes, address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative, all of whom must have completed secondary school and have no criminal records. If an association with a religious character fails to register with the Ministry, its representative will be reminded of the requirement to do so; if the representative does not comply, the place of worship or association will be asked to close down; if it does not close down when ordered to do so, the representative of the religious institution or association can be jailed for a period of six months to five

years.

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 religious institutions and also often waives taxes on the importation by religious institutions 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, All Saint's Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no known abuses of religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

In August 2002, rebels from the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) in Kigihu, Rutana Province, reportedly killed parish priest Peter Tondo. The motive appears to have been robbery, and there is no indication that the killing was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim.

In June 2001, rebels killed a nun in the area of Mutambara in an ambush on a vehicle belonging to the Roman Catholic bishop of Bururi. In June 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, as neither vehicle carried any markings that would indicate the identity of the occupants. Highway banditry is a significant problem in Burundi. No action was taken against the responsible members of the rebel forces by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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.

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International Religious Freedom Report Home Page