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International Religious Freedom Report 2003

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respected that right; however, after September 19, the Government targeted persons perceived to be perpetrators or supporters of the rebellion, who often were Muslims.

The status of respect for religious freedom deteriorated somewhat during the period covered by this report. The Government is facing its greatest political crisis since independence following a failed coup attempt and mutiny in September 2002 that led to a division of the country. After the onset of the crisis, the Government cracked down on persons perceived to be associated with the rebellion, the majority of whose supporters appear to be Muslim citizens of northern origin. The repression directed against Muslims during the crisis, which included the killings of several Muslim leaders, eased by the end of the period covered by this report. Strong efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped prevent the crisis from turning into a religious conflict. The establishment of a Ministry of Religion in March highlights the Government's efforts to deal with religious strains.

Before the crisis began, the Government had undertaken a major effort to promote religious harmony among the country's various religious groups in order to counter efforts by groups using religion as a political tool. The Government followed up the Forum for National Reconciliation, which took place between October and December 2001, with several programs and initiatives aimed at improving relations between the Government and religious groups. Nonetheless, some Muslims believe that their religious and ethnic affiliation makes them targets of discrimination by the Government in practice with regard to both employment and the renewal of national identity cards.

Relations among the various religious groups have become strained at times since the onset of the national crisis; there is some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions.

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 land area of 122,780 square miles, and its population is approximately 16 million. Religious groups in the country include Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and traditional indigenous religions. Major Protestant groups include the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Church, the Autonomous Church of Celestial Christianity of Oschoffa, the Union of the Evangelical Church of Services and Works of Cote d'Ivoire, the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Harrist Church (an African Protestant denomination founded in the country in 1913 by a Liberian preacher named William Wade Harris), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire, the Coptic Church, the Pentecostal Church of Cote d'Ivoire, the Interdenominational Church, the Yoruba First Church, the Church of God International Missions, and the Baptist Church Missions. Other religions include Buddhism, the Baha'i Faith, the Church of the Prophet Papa Nouveau (a syncretistic religion founded in the country in 1937 that combines Christian doctrine, traditional indigenous rituals, and practical concern for social, political, and economic progress for Africans), the Messianic Church, Bossonism (the traditional religious practices of the Akan ethnic group), the Limmoudim of Rabbi Jesus (a small Christian group, the origins of which are unknown), the Eckankar religion (a syncretistic religion founded in 1965 in Nigeria that sees human passion as an obstacle to uniting a person's divine qualities), and the Movement of Raelis. Many religious groups in the country are associated with American religious groups.

The published results of the most recent national census, conducted in 1998, indicated that Muslims make up approximately 38.6 percent of the country's resident population; Catholics, 19.4 percent; practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, 11.9 percent; Protestants, 6.6 percent; other Christians, 3.1 percent;

practitioners of other religions, 1.7 percent; Harrists, 1.3 percent; and persons without religious preference or affiliation, 16.7 percent. Among citizens, 27.4 percent are Muslim, 20.8 percent are Catholic, 15.4 percent practice traditional indigenous religions, 8.2 percent are Protestant, 3.4 percent are of other Christian affiliations, 1.9 percent practice other religions, 1.6 percent are Harrist, and 20.7 percent are without religious affiliation. Foreigners living in the country are 70.5 percent Muslim and 15.4 percent Catholic with small percentages practicing other religions.

Most of the country's many syncretistic religions are forms of Christianity that contain some traditional indigenous practices and rituals. Many such religions were founded by local or other African prophets and are organized around and dependent upon the founder's personality. Some emphasize faith healing or the sale of sacred objects imbued with supernatural powers to bring health and good luck. Many nominal Christians and Muslims practice some aspects of traditional indigenous religions, especially in difficult times.

Generally there has been a trend towards conversion by practitioners of traditional religions to Christianity and Islam. Missionary work, urbanization, immigration, and higher education levels have led to a decline in the percentage of practitioners of traditional religions from 37 percent in 1975 to 11.9 percent in 1998.

Muslims are found in the greatest numbers in the northern half of the country, although they also are becoming increasingly numerous in the cities of the south, west, and east due to immigration, migration, and inter-ethnic marriages. In 1998 Muslims composed 45.5 percent of the total urban population and 33.5 percent of the total rural population. Catholics live mostly in the southern, central, and eastern portions of the country, though recently some animists in the north have converted to Catholicism. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religions are concentrated in rural areas of the country's north, west, center, and east. Protestants are concentrated in the central, eastern, and southwest regions. Members of the Harrist Church are concentrated in the south.

Political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines. As population growth and movement have accentuated ethnic distinctions between the groups of the Sahel and those of the forest zone, those distinctions sometimes have been expressed in terms of religion such as northern Muslims and southern Christians and traditionalists.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa generally are at least nominally Muslim or Christian. The majority of foreign missionaries are European or American representatives of established religions, but some Nigerians and Congolese also have set up churches. In the past, Catholic priests were better educated than leaders of other religions. Numerous Catholic schools were founded in the country in the early 1900s during French colonial rule, and people who attended these schools generally received good educations and became a disproportionately large part of the country's elite. Many senior government officials, including all four heads of state since independence, have been Catholics. The Baoule ethnic minority, which has dominated the State and the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI), that governed the country from independence in 1960 until 1999 largely is Catholic, although some Baoules continue to practice traditional indigenous religion and a few practice Islam. After 39 years of political dominance, the PDCI was driven from power in a military coup in 1999. Following 10 months of transitional military rule, the country elected a new president from the FPI, another political party composed primarily of Christians and individuals practicing traditional indigenous religions. In January 2002, the country became a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

On September 19, 2002, a coup attempt led by exiled military members and co-conspirators quickly evolved into a rebellion. In Abidjan, government forces stopped the coup attempt within hours, but the rebel forces established control over the northern half of the country. In late November 2002, the rebel movement opened to the west, as fighting erupted in the region between government and rebel forces. The opposing sides signed cease-fire agreements in October 2002 and January. On January 25, all major parties to the crisis signed the Linas-Marcoussis Accord, which aimed to end the crisis and bring about national reconciliation.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, implemented in August 2000, provides for freedom of religion; however, at times the Government limited this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, for historical and ethnic reasons the Government informally favors Christianity. For example, the Government continues to subsidize both Roman Catholic and other Christian schools, although at lower levels than in the past; it does not subsidize Muslim schools.

In past years, the Government has paid for the construction of Catholic cathedrals; however, the Government also sponsors or finances the construction of shrines for groups other than the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the Government was directing the construction of the

Plateau Mosque in central Abidjan and financing it with the help of governments or government-affiliated religious organizations of some largely Islamic Arab countries.

The Government established registration requirements for religious groups under a 1939 French law. All religious groups wishing to operate in the country must submit to the Ministry of the Interior a file including the group's bylaws, the names of the founding members, the date of founding (or date on which the founder received the revelation of his or her calling), general assembly minutes, the names of members of the administrative board, and other information. The Interior Ministry investigates the backgrounds of the founding members to ascertain that the group has no politically subversive purpose. However, in practice the Government's regulation of religious groups generally has not been restrictive since 1990. Although nontraditional religious groups, like public secular associations, are required to register with the Government, no penalties are imposed on a group that fails to register. In practice registration may bring advantages of public recognition, invitations to official ceremonies and events, publicity, gifts, and school subsidies. No religious group has complained of arbitrary registration procedures or recognition; however, the Government does not register traditional indigenous religious groups.

The Government grants no tax or other benefits to religious groups; however, some religious groups have gained some favors after individual negotiations. Examples include reductions in the cost of resident alien registration, customs exemptions on certain religious items, diplomatic passports for major religious chiefs, and, in some cases, privileges similar to those of diplomats. No particular religion is favored consistently in this manner.

Foreign missionaries must meet the same requirements as any foreigner, including resident alien registration and identification card requirements. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were denied such registration arbitrarily.

Religious instruction is permitted in public schools and usually offered after normal class hours. Such instruction is offered by established Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant groups. While in practice a 1966 government decree that allows for "only" Catholic and Protestant teachings in schools no longer is enforced, several Muslim leaders complain that the Government has not yet eliminated the decree.

The Government has taken some positive steps to promote interfaith understanding. Government officials, including the President and his religious advisers, appear at major religious celebrations and events organized by a wide variety of faiths and groups. The Government often invites leaders of various religious communities (but not of traditional indigenous religious groups) to attend official ceremonies and to sit on deliberative and advisory committees, including the Mediation Committee for National Reconciliation.

In March, following the signing of the Marcoussis agreement, the Government created a Ministry of Religion to improve interfaith understanding. The Ministry sought to promote national reconciliation and to help prevent the national crisis from turning into an inter-ethnic and religious conflict. The Government created the Ministry to emphasize the secular nature of the state, because both Muslim and Christian groups believe the State disproportionately favors the other.

Some groups opposed the creation of the Ministry of Religion, most notably, a fundamentalist Christian group called The Limmoudim de rabbi Jesus, which released a lengthy press statement saying that their religious doctrine predicted the ministry would be dangerous and destabilizing.

Along with the creation of the Ministry of Religion, several other programs have helped to further interfaith understanding during the crisis. In early April, the Government hosted an international colloquium for West African religions on "The Role of Religions in the Resolution of Regional Conflicts." The colloquium concluded that religion needs to be more of a force for cohesion rather than division. The colloquium praised the local religious communities for putting aside their differences and working together for peace.

During the period covered by this report, some Muslims continued to claim that the country is not a true secular state, but rather a Judeo-Christian state, with a preference given to the Catholic religion. Muslim leaders claimed that many state institutions, particularly the national television and radio stations, were dominated by Christian programming, including broadcasts of Catholic masses, choirs, religious services, and Christian music. Specifically, the Islamic National Council (CNI) and the Muslim community questioned why Catholics have more than 10 radio frequencies, while Muslims had only 1 frequency. However, Muslim leaders do appear on state television, and the Government has recognized all major Muslim religious holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government monitors minority religious groups for signs of political activity that it considers subversive. The Government has expanded its surveillance of Islamic associations during the crisis.

Traditionally the Government informally has favored the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic Church leaders have had a much stronger voice in government affairs than their Islamic counterparts, which led to feelings of disenfranchisement among some in the Muslim population. President Gbagbo continues to meet with Muslims leaders to discuss their concerns. In late June 2002, Gbagbo met Imam Idriss Kone Koudouss, President of the National Islamic Council, and proposed to create a new national Islamic center.

Some Muslims believe that their religious or ethnic affiliation makes them targets of discrimination by the Government with regard to both employment and the renewal of national identity cards. Due to the tense political situation in the country and the ethnic and religious divisions along which political party lines are drawn, some Muslims are scrutinized more closely in the identity card application process. As most Muslims share names, style of dress, and customs with several of the country's predominantly Muslim neighboring countries, they sometimes are wrongly accused of attempting to obtain nationality cards illegally in order to vote or otherwise take advantage of citizenship. The Marcoussis agreement calls for the resolution of the national identity question and improved implementation of naturalization laws to ensure the granting of citizenship in an equitable manner to those qualified.

Muslims often have had to struggle for state benefits that came more easily to practitioners of other religions. For example, Catholic and Protestant schools are regarded as official schools supervised by the Ministry of Education and subsidized by the Government. The Government allows Islamic schools that follow an official curriculum but does not subsidize them. Churches organize Christian pilgrimages without government supervision; however, in 2001 the Government paid for a pilgrimage to Rome for 81 Roman Catholics. Muslim organizations continue to view the Government's pilgrimages as unnecessary and unwarranted interference.

Traditional indigenous religions rarely are included in official or unofficial lists of the country's religions. There is no generally accepted system for classifying the country's diverse traditional religious practices, which vary not only by ethnic group, but also by region, village, and family, as well as by gender and age group. In addition, members of the country's largely Christian or Islamic urban elite, which effectively control the State, generally seem disinclined to allow traditional indigenous religions the social status accorded to Christianity and Islam. For example, no traditional indigenous religious leader (except for traditional rulers, who also may perform some traditional religious functions) is known to have been invited to present New Year's greetings to the President or to take part in a government advisory council. However, traditional Akan chiefs very often are invited to participate in traditional libation ceremonies aimed at recognizing ancestors at the beginning of important ceremonies.

The Government does not prohibit links to foreign coreligionists but informally discourages connections with politically radical fundamentalist movements, such as Islamic groups based in Iran or Libya.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Following the September 19, 2002, rebellion, there were credible reports of military and security forces committing abuses, including reprisal killings, against presumed rebel sympathizers, which included many Muslims. In October 2002, security forces reportedly killed more than 100 noncombatants, mostly Muslims, in Daloa in evident reprisal against northerners living in the town, following their alleged support of advancing rebel forces. Witnesses reported that uniformed forces took from their homes individuals of northern descent or foreign Africans (often Muslim, generally called Dioulas); their bodies were found in the streets the following day. A Muslim cleric, Gaoussou Sylla, was arrested at home with five other persons, including the Malian honorary consul, Malian merchants, and the Burkinabe owner of a transport company. The bodies of Sylla and the other five subsequently were found along a road out of town; the businesses of the victims were looted. Uniformed forces also killed a number of Guinean Muslims in Daloa. Hundreds of Daloa residents took shelter in a mosque while government forces ransacked and burned their homes. The Governments of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea lodged formal protests with the Government over the deaths in Daloa and the harassment and abuse of northerners in Abidjan and other cities.

The Government denied that its forces were responsible for the Daloa killings. The Government criticized such actions as flagrant violations of human rights committed by men "wearing fatigues." However, the international press and human rights organizations reported that security forces were responsible for the killings in Daloa, citing multiple eyewitnesses who saw the men who carried out the killings arrive in clearly marked military vehicles. Amnesty International noted that military authorities stopped the killings when pressed by Muslim leaders who underscored the responsibility of government authorities to ensure that security forces protected civilians and prevented harassment. On October 25, 2002, the Government announced an investigation into the killings, which so far has yielded no results.

During the current crisis, according to credible reports, government forces, along with unknown assailants, have killed several Muslim leaders. In January gendarmes arrested Mamadou Ganame, a Koranic instructor in Bianoua, Ayame (in the southeast) during a graduation ceremony for his students. His body later was found in the Aboisso morgue. Also in January, four armed gunmen killed Imam Mahmoud Samassi, founder and Imam of the Lycee Technique Mosque in Abidjan at his residence. On January 8, CNI and the High Council of Imams (COSIM) marched in Abidjan to protest Samassi's murder. In February unknown assailants in gendarme uniforms killed Mohamed Sangare, the assistant Imam for the Adobo

Mosque in Abidjan. The gunmen shot Sangare twice when he refused to get into their car. Also in February, during curfew hours, several gendarme and police officers searched and looted several residences in Anyama, a predominantly Muslim district in Abidjan. During the search, gendarme officers killed Mory Fanny Cisse, an Islamic preacher, when he refused to open his door. Two others were injured when security forces shot several rounds to disperse the crowd that had gathered in an attempt to stop the removal of Cisse's corpse.

In addition, according to the CNI, government security forces "forcibly searched" seven mosques and reportedly looted residences of at least 10 Muslim leaders in Abidjan. In late October 2002, CNI said that government forces searched all mosques in the western town of Man. There are no known reports that the Government found weapons in any of the mosques.

On October 30, 2002, the CNI issued a statement asserting that since the September 19 rebellion, the Muslim community had fallen under "unfair suspicion" and was suffering arbitrary arrests, beatings, and killing by security forces. The CNI statement claimed that state television and radio had created a climate of hatred. Also in October, Mamadou Sy, Imam for the central mosque of Bouake, called on all sides to cease violence and "hateful rhetoric."

In March CNI President Imam Idriss Koudouss Kone again severely criticized what he claimed was the targeting of Muslim leaders and said that security forces were acting "with impunity" because no one had been charged in any of the murders of Muslims. Imam Cisse Djiguiba, Imam of the Plateau Mosque in Abidjan, insisted that it was the Government's responsibility to protect all citizens without exception.

In April Minister of National Reconciliation Dano Djedje met with Muslim leaders to hear their grievances. El Hadj Diaby Abass, the Imam for the central mosque in Daloa, told Dano Djedje that gendarmes regularly enter Daloa mosques during curfew hours and conduct weapons searches. He claimed that churches were not searched. Diaby also reported that when he traveled from Daloa to Abidjan, he was the only passenger on the bus asked for identity papers, which he presumed was because of his religion and dress. Minister Djedje undertook to examine the Muslims' grievances; however, no action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

There were credible reports that security forces detained and questioned Islamic leaders on suspicions that they were plotting with the rebels. One prominent case was Sylla Baba, principal Imam in the western town of Bonon, who was arrested and released three times without charges being filed. In October 2002, security forces arrested Mamadou Fofana and Diarrassouba Mohamed, two Imams from the western coastal town of San Pedro, on suspicion of aiding rebel forces. Fofana subsequently was released, but Mohamed remained in detention at a military camp at the end of the period covered by this report. In December 2002, government security forces arrested Tiesibiry Kone, president of the Man chapter of CNI, and held him without charges for 2 days before releasing him.

The FESCI has perpetrated violence against competing or constituent student groups, including the Association of Muslim Students. The latter complained that FESCI confused being a member of the Republican Rally (RDR) political party with being Muslim. While there is a high correlation, they are not synonymous.

There were no reports of persons detained solely on religious grounds.

Information gathering is more difficult in the rebel-held north and west, but there have been several reports of religious violence. Rebels in Bouake and elsewhere in the north executed more than 100 persons, most of whom were Christian, who were members of the armed forces or persons thought to be loyal to the Government. In April rebel Patriotic Movement for Cote d'Ivoire (MPCI) forces detained several Buddhist missionaries traveling to Bouake, accusing them of being loyalist gendarmes in disguise. The MPCI forces reportedly beat at least one of the Buddhists before releasing them. Also in April, MPCI forces severely beat and tortured three Christian priests at the Saint Jean Bosco Mission in the northern city of Korhogo while searching for an escaped prisoner. The MPCI security forces also beat members of the congregation that tried to assist the priests. The rebel forces searched the mission, then abducted the three priests, placing them in a prison cell. After several hours of further beatings, they released the three priests. In April Maurice Dodo, a church leader in the western town of Daloa, reported that western rebels held him for 12 days. He reported being tortured and threatened with death before being released. Also in April, rebel forces searched and damaged a Catholic church in the northern city of Tengrela. In June rebel forces looted a church still under construction in Bouake.

In February after the murder of a prominent Muslim comedian Camara Yerefe, unknown assailants used clubs and machetes to attack an Abidjan church, leaving several injured, including the church's pastor.

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

Relations among the various religious groups have become strained since the onset of the national crisis in September 2002; there is some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions.

The country's Islamic communities are subject to some societal discrimination. Some non-Muslims have objected to the construction of mosques, such as the new mosque in Abidjan's Plateau district, expressing concerns that the Islamic duty to give alms daily may attract beggars to neighborhoods containing mosques. Some non-Muslims also object to having to hear the muezzins' calls to prayer. Some persons consider all Muslims as foreigners or fundamentalists, and Muslims sometimes are referred to as "destabilizing forces." Muslim citizens often are treated as foreigners by their fellow citizens, including by government officials, because most Muslims are members of northern ethnic groups that also are found in other African countries from which there has been substantial immigration into the country. Muslims also frequently are discriminated against because of ethnic origin or presumed support for the presidential candidacy of former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim. Many Muslims are northerners and tended to support the presidential candidacy of Ouattara and the RDR and opposed the ruling FPI.

Followers of traditional indigenous religions also are subject to societal discrimination. Many leaders of religions such as Christianity or Islam look down on practitioners of traditional indigenous religions as pagans and practitioners of black magic or human sacrifice. Some Christians or Muslims refuse to associate with practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. The practices of traditional indigenous religions often are secret and include exclusive initiation rites, oaths of silence, and taboos against writing down orally transmitted history. However, there have been no reports of human sacrifice in the country since well before independence. Although the purported practice of black magic or witchcraft continues to be feared widely, it generally is discouraged by traditional indigenous religions, aspects of which commonly purport to offer protection from witchcraft. Traditional indigenous religions commonly involve belief in one supreme deity as well as lesser deities or spirits that are to be praised or appeased, some of which may in some religions be believed to inhabit or otherwise be associated with particular places, natural objects, or man-made images. However, many practitioners of traditional indigenous religions are unaware of, or do not see their problems resulting from, societal discrimination and have not complained.

Conflicts between and within religious groups have surfaced occasionally. The Celestial Christians have been divided because of a leadership struggle. In June followers of rival leaders Blin Jacob Edimou and Louis Akeble Zagadou clashed over the ownership of a church under construction. Police officers arrested six men. Construction on the church remains suspended until the Minister of Religion has examined the dispute. In February 2002, the Church reunified after the head of the church in Nigeria reinstated Blin Jacob Edimou, the founding priest of the Ivoirian Celestial Church, to his position as head of the Church. Edimou had been removed in 1987 following accusations of impropriety. There were no further developments on the Harrist leadership struggle during the period covered by this report.

Some human rights groups report that relations between Muslims and Christians, specifically Catholics, have improved at the end of the period covered by this report since the first few months after the national crisis began in September 2002. There have been many examples of interfaith cooperation during the crisis. Since October 2002, Cardinal Bernard Agre and El Hadj Idriss Koudouss Kone, two of the country's most prominent religious leaders, have met once a week and regularly participate in the celebration of each other's main religious events. On October 14, 2002, the Catholic Church of Cote d'Ivoire released a statement asking for tolerance and dialog among the parties. The church asked all citizens to put aside their differences and work to return the country to the peaceful existence it had enjoyed for many years. On November 15, 2002, on the occasion of the celebration of the National Day of Peace, Christians and Muslims participated in an ecumenical mass in Yamoussoukro. On February 11, to celebrate the Muslim holiday of Tabaski, several leading Catholic and other religious leaders attended the Muslim religious observances conducted by Imam Koudouss at his mosque in the Yopougon section of Abidjan.

Prior to the crisis, there were examples of longstanding interfaith cooperation. Once a year, on New Year's Eve, members of all Christian religious groups gather in the National Stadium in Abidjan to keep a night-long vigil and pray. When serious social problems have arisen, simultaneous Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim prayer ceremonies have been held in churches, temples, and mosques to ask for divine assistance. Kouassi-Datekro, a town in the Akan region in the eastern part of the country, is famous for ecumenical events involving simultaneous prayer services of all faiths. Religious leaders from diverse groups have assembled on their own initiative to mediate in times of political conflict; however, no leaders of traditional indigenous religious groups have been included.

The Forum of Religious Confessions, created by the Research Group in Democracy and Social and Economic Development of Cote d'Ivoire (GERDDES-CI), a democracy and civic education group, includes the leaders of many of the country's religious faiths, including Catholics, Muslims, various Protestant

groups, several syncretist groups, the Association of Traditional Priests, and the Bossonists, an association of indigenous Akan religious priests. The Forum is headed by the leader of the Celestial Christian Church, and its objective is to promote dialog, increase understanding, and improve religious leaders' and groups' relationships.

GERDDES-CI helped to create the Collective of Civil Society for Peace (CCSP), which has worked since the beginning of the September 2002 crisis to promote national reconciliation. Some observers believe that the CCSP's work helped prevent the national crisis from turning into a religious war. The CCSP conducted "tolerance workshops" in 20 of the country's 58 departments, in response to the violence in Daloa and the high tension throughout the country. Six-person teams, comprised of Christians, Muslims, and human rights representatives, traveled to deliver a message of unity and showed local leaders how to exercise and teach tolerance. In October 2002, President Gbagbo publicly announced his support for the tolerance workshops.

In January the CCSP organized a national ecumenical prayer service for peace, led by President Gbagbo. The prayers took place in a football stadium in Abidjan and Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist religious leaders participated.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government has monitored and reported on the status of religious freedom, developed and maintained contacts with leaders of diverse religious groups, sent several religious leaders to the United States on International Visitor programs, and discussed religious freedom issues with government officials in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Since the onset of the crisis, the U.S. Embassy has assisted efforts by the Government and nongovernmental organizations to mitigate religious tensions in the country. The U.S. Ambassador regularly meets with religious leaders.

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