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

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 132,000 square miles and a population of 3.8 million. Approximately one-half of citizens are Christian. An estimated 90 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic; others include Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is a growing Muslim community, estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most Muslim workers in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa, Lebanon, and North Africa. The West African Muslim immigrants arrived mainly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a significant Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population is made up of practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs, those who belong to various messianic groups, and those who practice no religion. A small minority of Christians practice Kimbanguism, a syncretistic movement that originated in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool region) have been associated with opposition political movements, including some elements of the armed insurrection in the southern part of the country from 1997 to 2003.

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 Constitution specifically forbids discrimination on the basis of religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups; however, the process is time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners; no criminal penalties are applicable. Even after groups have registered, it is not uncommon for police or other governmental officials to summon leaders or organizers, request information about the group, and assess a fee of \$48 (20,000 FCFA) in order to process requested materials. However, there were no reports of religious groups being singled out in this process during the reporting period.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. Islamic holy days are not nationally observed; however, they are respected. For example, employers grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

Religion is not taught in public schools; however, private religious schools devote class time to religious studies.

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 were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In some forest communities where there are pygmy populations, there was some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their cultural practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

A joint ecumenical council, which met in January 2009, represented all organized religious groups.

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. These discussions included highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly.

