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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Republic of the Congo

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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

U.S. government efforts to promote religious freedom were commensurate with the state of religious freedom. Human rights-related consultations with religious leaders, refugees, and prisoners served as opportunities to advocate for the freedom to practice one's religion – in refugee sites, prisons, and elsewhere – irrespective of one's faith.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 80 percent of citizens are Christian, of which an estimated 42 percent are Roman Catholic, 53 percent are Protestant, 3 percent are Kimbanguist (a Christian-inspired Congolese church), and 2 percent are Salvationist. Twenty-eight percent of Protestants are evangelical. An estimated 11 percent of the population is atheist, and 2 percent is Muslim. The remaining 7 percent of the population includes members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and other unspecified religious groups. A significant portion of the population intermingles animist beliefs and practices with Christianity and other religious beliefs. Located throughout the country are an estimated 726,000 Muslim foreign migrant workers and 180 mosques; both citizens and migrant workers may practice in these mosques.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution specifically forbids discrimination based on 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 when applying for registration; however, the process is time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation of foreigners.

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

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. The government does not observe Islamic holy days nationally; however, it granted leave to Muslim employees for observation of religious holidays and encouraged other employers to do the same. Employers typically grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

The government grants Christians and Muslims access to public facilities for religious worship in connection with Christmas and Ramadan.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Although the government required that religious groups register, there were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process during the year.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The government invited Christian and Muslim leaders to participate as civil society representatives in a political dialogue held in the Cuvette Ouest provincial capital of Ewo in December in preparation for the 2012 legislative elections.

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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

An interfaith committee composed of leaders of the Ecumenical Council, Islamic Council, and Revivalist Council convened meetings on an ad-hoc basis to respond to issues of joint concern.

Adherents of each faith live together peacefully in urban areas with rare reports of intolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom in interactions with the government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials used U.S. government-led consultations with leadership of the Islamic Council, the Christian community, and government ministries to advocate for religious freedom.
