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20/9-99  
DR Congo (République Zaïre) (60)

**U.S. Department of State**  
**Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:**  
**Congo, Democratic Republic of**

Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
Washington, DC, September 9, 1999

**CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF**

**Section I. Freedom of Religion**

Although there is no Constitution currently in effect, the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, provided that worshipers neither disturb public order nor contradict commonly held morals.

The establishment and operation of religious institutions is provided for by and regulated through a statutory order on Regulation of Non-profit Associations and Public Utility Institutions. Requirements for the establishment of a religious organization are simple and generally not subject to abuse. Exemption from taxation is among the benefits granted to religious organizations. A 1971 law regulating religious organizations grants civil servants the power to recognize, suspend official recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. There have been no reports of the Government suspending or dissolving a religious group since 1990, when the Government suspended its recognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses; that suspension was subsequently reversed by a court. Although this law restricts the process for official recognition, officially recognized religions are free to establish places of worship and to train clergy. In practice, religious groups that are not recognized also worship freely.

Approximately 50 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, 20 percent are Protestant, and 10 are percent Islamic. The remainder largely practice traditional indigenous religions exclusively. There are no available statistics on the percentage of atheists. Minority religious groups include, among others, Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. There are no reliable data on active participation in religious services. Ethnic and political differences generally do not correspond to religious differences.

Although the Government required that foreign religious groups obtain the approval of the President, through the Minister of Justice, foreign religious groups generally operate without restriction once they receive approval from the Government. Many recognized churches have external ties, and foreign missionaries are allowed to proselytize. The Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries. However, foreign missionaries have not been exempt from general human rights abuses by security forces, such as restrictions on freedom of movement imposed on all persons by security force members that erect and man roadblocks where they solicit bribes.

There has been no known persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses or any other groups for practicing their faith in recent years.

In April 1998, the Ministry of the Interior banned the operations of Radio Amani, the Catholic Church station in Kisangani, ostensibly because it lacked proper operating licenses. The station had carried British Broadcasting Corporation news programming and commentary unfavorable to the Government.

The Government took no steps to promote interfaith understanding or promote interfaith dialog.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of persons detained or imprisoned solely because of their religious beliefs. Security forces detained Pastor Ngoy Ilunga for 4 days in December 1997 for criticizing President Kabila and his Government during a church-sponsored seminar. Ngoy was taken into detention again on December 16, 1997, and was released on July 2, 1998.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who were abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## **Section II. Societal Attitudes**

Relations between the major religions were amicable.

## **Section III. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. The U.S. Information Agency's office in the country sponsored visitors from the country to the U.S. on programs that acquainted them with religious freedom and religious diversity in the U.S. and is currently sponsoring a project that promotes free speech, including free religious speech.

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