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2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Burundi

[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 10,747 square miles and a population of 8.1 million. Although reliable statistics on the followers of various religious groups are not available, sources estimate Roman Catholics to be 60 percent of the population, members of indigenous religious groups 20 percent, and Protestants 15 percent. The Muslim population is estimated to be between 2 and 5 percent, the majority of whom live in urban areas. Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims; the remainder is Shi'a.

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. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ascension Day, the Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association of a religious nature must file the denomination or affiliation of the

institution, a copy of its bylaws, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. It usually takes between two and four weeks for the Ministry to process a registration request. During the reporting period, no religious institution had its request for registration refused.

The Ministry reminds religious groups of registration requirements; if the place of worship or association does not comply with these requirements, the Ministry instructs it to close down. Although a representative of the religious institution can be jailed for six months to five years for failing to comply with these instructions, the Ministry has not penalized any religious representatives in recent years.

While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Ministry of Finance often negotiates waivers of taxes on religious articles or goods imported by religious institutions that are destined for social development purposes. There is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

Foreign representatives of major religious organizations, such as the Catholic and Anglican Churches, are accorded diplomatic status.

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.

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.
