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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Cote d'Ivoire

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. Government actions continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were only minor reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social and religious leaders made concerted efforts to promote religious freedom and encourage interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy in Abidjan engaged with local religious and civil society leaders regularly throughout the year to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 35 to 40 percent of the population is Christian, an equal percentage is Muslim, and an estimated 25 percent practice indigenous religious beliefs. Many persons who are nominally Christian or Muslim also practice some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Traditionally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity, although practitioners of both religions live throughout the country. In general, political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Southern Baptists, Copts, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Other religious groups include Buddhists, Baha'is, followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Bossonists, who follow a traditional practice of the Akan ethnic group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Interior's Department of Faith-Based Organizations is responsible for promoting religious freedom in the country.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the government. Groups must submit an application to the Department of Faith-Based Organizations. This application must include the group's bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding, and general assembly minutes. The department investigates the organization to ensure that the group has no politically subversive members or purpose.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost Monday, Lailat al-Qadr, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Many northern Muslims continued to feel discriminated against when applying for certificates of nationality and passports, despite the government's efforts to issue replacement birth certificates and to ensure that citizens lacking identification documents could register to vote.

The government continued previous policies of providing to Muslims funding and organization for the Hajj to Saudi Arabia and to Christians for less publicized pilgrimages to Israel. The government's role in determining which groups received subsidies for their religious trips remained a controversial but minor political issue.

Although religious leaders criticized the government without repercussion, some religious groups stated the government did not allow equal access to state-run television and radio.

The government included prominent Muslim and Catholic religious leaders in reconciliation efforts. It appointed the country's acknowledged Muslim leader, Cheick Boikary Fofana, and Catholic Archbishop Paul-Siméon Ahouana as vice presidents of the Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission, along with other religious leaders. The appointments were to promote peace and stability in the country and to prevent outbreaks of interethnic political violence.

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.

Some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of indigenous religious beliefs continued during the year. Other groups, particularly evangelical Christians, complained that some government officials discriminated against them and perpetrated sectarian hostility at the local level. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Religious leaders, for example, organized public interfaith activities during the reporting period and issued joint statements to promote national

reconciliation, elections, and tolerance.

The Forum of Religious Confessions, a nongovernmental interfaith organization founded in 2004-05, promoted dialogue and improved relationships among religious leaders and groups during the year. Another independent group, the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace, promoted similar goals and was composed primarily of evangelical churches.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials met regularly with local religious and civil society leaders throughout the year to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. The ambassador hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) for 65 Muslim community leaders, Muslim employees of the U.S. embassy, and American section heads on August 10.
