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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Cote d'Ivoire

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

Some religious tension among Catholics, Muslims, followers of indigenous beliefs, and evangelical Protestants continued with each group believing itself disadvantaged vis-à-vis the others; however, religious leaders made concerted efforts to encourage interfaith dialogue.

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 124,500 square miles and a population of 21 million. An estimated 35 to 40 percent of the population is Christian and an equal percentage is Muslim; an estimated 25 percent practices 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. The political crisis that began in 2002 displaced more than 700,000 persons internally, and many fled to a different region. In general political and religious affiliations tended 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, Bahais, 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

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. Although there is no state religion, the country's first two presidents were Catholic. For this reason the government has historically favored Christianity, particularly Catholicism.

Muslims were underrepresented in official positions, including in the civil service. Muslims also were underrepresented in state-supported media outlets, particularly radio and television stations.

The Department of Faith-Based Organizations is responsible for promoting religious freedom and official secularism in the country.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the government. Groups must submit an application to the Ministry of Interior's Department of Faith-Based Organizations. This application must include the group's bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding (or the date on which the founder received the revelation of his or her calling), and general assembly minutes. The Ministry of Interior 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

Some Muslim organizations viewed the government's organizational requirements for the Hajj to Saudi Arabia as unnecessary and unwarranted interference in religious affairs. Although less publicized, the government also funded some pilgrimages by Catholics. The government's role in determining which groups received subsidies for their religious trips remained a controversial political issue.

Although religious leaders criticized the government without any retaliation, some religious groups complained that the government did not allow all religious groups equal access to national media outlets, including state-run television and radio.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

Some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of indigenous religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Other groups, particularly evangelical Christians, complained that some government officials discriminated against them and perpetrated sectarian hostility at the local level. The ongoing political crisis has created divisions based predominantly on ethnic and economic differences, not religious ones.

Religious leaders continued to organize public interfaith activities during the reporting period, issuing joint statements to promote national reconciliation, elections, and tolerance.

The Forum of Religious Confessions promoted dialogue and improved relationships among religious leaders and groups. The Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace promoted similar goals and included evangelical churches that had previously refused to join the forum.

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. Embassy officials regularly met with a broad range of civil society groups that promote religious tolerance.
