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Angola

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 481,351 square miles, and its population is approximately 13 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the population, with Roman Catholicism as the largest single denomination. The Roman Catholic Church claims 5 million adherents, but this figure cannot be verified. The major Protestant denominations also are present, along with a number of Brazilian and indigenous African Christian denominations. The largest Protestant denominations, which include Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God, claim to have 3 to 5 million adherents. The largest syncretic religious group is the Kimbanguist Church, whose followers believe that mid-20th century Congolese pastor Joseph Kimbangu was a prophet. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is also a small Islamic community, less than 1 percent of the population, mainly comprised of migrants from West Africa and families of Lebanese extraction. There are few declared atheists in the country.

Foreign-based missionaries operate freely throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministries of Justice and Culture; groups must provide general background information to register. In March 2004, the National Assembly unanimously approved a law establishing stricter criteria for the registration of religious groups. According to the new law, a religious group must have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration. All 85 previously registered groups retain their registration and juridical status, regardless of the current number of members. At the end of the period covered by this report, two groups had pending applications. The Government did not shut down any religious groups during the period covered by this report.

The Ministries of Justice and Culture currently recognize 85 denominations. There reportedly are more than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese- or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical organizations that have not had action taken on their registration applications. Colonial-era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from the country; although those statutes have not been repealed, they no longer are enforced. Religious groups have the right to civil registration.

The Government permits religious organizations and missions to establish and operate schools. Some members of the small Lebanese Muslim community in Luanda complain that they have been thwarted in

efforts to establish an Islamic community school.

The country's religious leaders have taken an active role in promoting the peace and national reconciliation process, and President dos Santos has consulted with them on constitutional and electoral issues as well as social and development issues.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In March 2004, the Minister of Justice again publicly warned that the colonial-era law banning non-Christian religions, while not regularly enforced, remained the law and could be enforced against any radical religious groups advocating terrorism or public disturbances. Several local Muslims have complained that the Ministry of Justice has hampered their efforts to form an Islamic Association.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In 2003, government officials sharply criticized Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia's call-in programs in which participants criticized the Government. However, Radio Ecclesia continued to host the programs. In May 2004, President dos Santos stated publicly that Radio Ecclesia could operate nationwide. In April 2005, Radio Ecclesia's operators began taking steps to broadcast from five provincial capitals in addition to Luanda; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, Radio Ecclesia had not been permitted to broadcast nationwide via a network of repeaters.

During the period covered by this report, 17 religious groups remained banned in Cabinda on charges of practicing medicine without a license on the groups' members, illegally holding religious services in residences, and not being registered. In March 2005, several lay members of the Catholic Church in Cabinda displayed banners protesting the nomination of a non-Cabindan as bishop during an Easter season Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Luanda. Police did not interfere with the peaceful protest but stepped in to protect the Archbishop when protesters threw rocks at him as he left the cathedral in Cabinda.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There is a functioning ecumenical movement, particularly in support of post-conflict peace and reconciliation efforts. Groups involved include the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola, the Council of Christian Churches in Angola, and the Catholic Pro-Peace movement.

There also was continuing hostility against traditional religions that involve shamans, employ animal sacrifices, or are identified as practicing witchcraft. There have been reports of children being accused of witchcraft in some poor, rural areas and smaller cities. In some instances, these accusations have led to neglect, abuse, injury, or death. Established church groups have organized education campaigns to combat these practices. Legal authorities have arrested and prosecuted those who have abused, injured, or killed others accused of witchcraft.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials, and official visitors from the United States, routinely meet with the country's religious leaders in the context of peacekeeping, democratization, development, and humanitarian relief efforts. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society movement. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, maintained an ongoing dialogue with the leadership of the country's religious denominations.

The U.S. Government provided financial support to Radio Ecclesia to increase its public affairs and news programming as an independent alternative source of information for citizens. In addition, the Embassy funded dissemination of human and civil rights information through an ecumenical newsletter network.

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