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October 2001

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; however, government forces committed some abuses.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom in government-controlled areas during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, in areas of the country under the military occupation of Rwanda and the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) rebel group, respect for religious freedom continued to be poor. Credible reports indicate that RCD and Rwandan troops deliberately targeted churches in their general attacks on towns and villages. Between February and September 2000, RCD rebels and Rwandan authorities also exiled the Archbishop of Bukavu, whom they suspected of inciting resistance; however, these actions apparently resulted largely from political rather than religious motives. Although there have been reports that some Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) troops may have targeted Catholic clergy, subsequent reports indicate that UPDF troops were not involved in such incidents.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 1,456,500 square miles, and its population is approximately 52 million. Approximately 50 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, 20 percent are Protestant, and 10 percent are Muslim. The remainder largely practice traditional indigenous religions. There are no statistics available on the percentage of atheists. Minority religious groups include, among others, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

Foreign missionaries operate within the country.

There are no reliable data on active participation in religious services. Ethnic and political differences generally are not linked to religious differences.

Section II. Status of Freedom of Religion***Legal/Policy Framework***

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; however, government forces committed some abuses. There is no state religion.

The establishment and operation of religious institutions is provided for and regulated through a statutory order on the Regulation of Non-profit Associations and Public Utility Institutions. Requirements for the establishment of a religious organization are simple and generally are 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 recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. There have been no reports that the Government suspended or dissolved a religious group since 1990, when the Government suspended its recognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses; that suspension subsequently was reversed by a court. Although this law restricts the process of recognition, officially

recognized religions are free to establish places of worship and to train clergy.

The Government requires practicing religious to be registered; however, in practice unregistered religious groups operate unhindered.

Although the Government requires foreign religious groups to 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 generally are allowed to proselytize. The Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries.

The Government promoted interfaith understanding by supporting and consulting with the country's five major churches (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Orthodox, and Kimbanguist). President Joseph Kabila announced the liberalization of political party activities, a significant political reform, to the Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders at the Kimbanguist Center. The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders serves as a forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern, and it advises and counsels the Government while presenting a common moral and religious front.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In January 1999, former President Laurent Kabila promulgated a decree that restricts the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), including religious organizations, by establishing requirements for them; however, existing religious organizations were exempt, and the decree subsequently was not enforced.

In July 1999, the Government issued an order prohibiting private radio stations from transmitting foreign radio broadcasts, which stopped broadcasts by a Catholic radio station in Kinshasa and a number of secular radio stations; however, the Minister of Communication retracted the order in September 1999. There have been no further government attempts to restrict religious broadcasts. Catholic radio stations did not broadcast foreign radio transmissions during the period covered by this report.

While the Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries, foreign missionaries have not been exempt from general restrictions by security forces, such as restrictions on freedom of movement imposed on all persons by security force members who erect and man roadblocks where they solicit bribes.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the Government is tolerant in matters of religion, some abuses occurred in government-controlled areas as a result of the war. These abuses, usually the ransacking of churches and the pilfering of church property, generally were the result of a lack of discipline among government troops.

On December 28, 2000, the military intelligence unit DEMIAP arrested Cyrien Mbuka, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Boma, in Bas-Congo Province, allegedly on charges of engaging in subversive actions. It is believed that his arrest was due to conflicts within the parish. On January 9, 2001, Cardinal Frederic Etsou issued a press release in which he protested Bishop Mbuka's arrest and that of other bishops during 2000. Mbuka was released on January 10, 2001.

In September 2000, Catherine Nzuzi, president of the major faction of the Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution (MPR) party, organized a Mass in memory of former President Mobutu. Although she previously was arrested in September 1999 after she organized a Mass for the deceased leader, the Government allowed the 2000 Mass to occur without incident.

Following the October 2000 death in Rome of Emmanuel Kataliko, the Archbishop of Bukavu, the Catholic Church announced that he had died of a heart attack; however, the Government of Laurent Kabila claimed that Tutsis had poisoned the Archbishop. These reports, which were picked up quickly by the newspapers and radio, particularly those in the rebel territories, incited the populace and contributed to demonstrations in the city of Bukavu in October. Rebel gunfire reportedly killed a child during the demonstrations; other sources reported that four people were killed.

War broke out in 1998 between the Government and rebel forces; by the end of the period covered by this report, rebel forces backed by Rwanda and Uganda continued to control more than half of the country. The Government exercises little authority in areas east of the disengagement line. In areas of the country under the military occupation of Rwanda, and their respective rebel clients, respect for religious freedom continued to be poor. RCD rebels and their Rwandan allies committed significant abuses in these areas. Credible reports indicate that RCD and Rwandan troops deliberately targeted Catholic churches as a means of both intimidating the local population and in retaliation for the Church's perceived role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Abuses reportedly took the form of attacks on missions, killings of priests, the rape of nuns, and the burning of churches. Although there have been reports that some Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) troops may have targeted Catholic clergy, subsequent reports indicate that UPDF troops were not involved in such incidents.

Between February and September 2000, RCD rebels and Rwandan authorities kept Archbishop Kataliko of Bukavu in exile in the Kivu provinces because they suspected him of condoning resistance to the rebellion. These authorities only allowed the Archbishop's return to Bukavu on September 14 following significant U.S. and international pressure. The Archbishop died of a heart attack the following month while in Rome.

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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, in late June 2001, in Orientale Province, there were reports of witch hunts, which resulted in the killing of several hundred persons. The local population targeted the victims because they suspected and feared that they were casting spells on others. There is a common belief in the region that some persons have the power to cast spells on others; this fear sometimes rises to mass hysteria.

Leaders of major religions consult one another through the Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of the promoting human rights.

The U.S. Government criticized the forced internal exile of the Archbishop of Bukavu, in both private discussions and public statements. On numerous occasions, the U.S. Government also voiced its opposition to the presence of hostile foreign troops in the country. The U.S. Government also publicly criticized the war and launched a number of diplomatic initiatives, in concert with the U.N., to bring the conflict to an end.

[End]

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