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Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were isolated reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. ambassador and embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government, and maintained strong relationships with religious leaders. The embassy also sponsored a number of Muslim community events to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect.

Section I. Religious Demography

The government estimates the population to be 35.9 million. According to government data, 85 percent are Christians, 12 percent Muslims, and 3 percent Hindus, Jews, Bahais, or adherents of indigenous beliefs. Among Christians, 42 percent are Roman Catholics, 36 percent Anglicans, 15 percent are Pentecostal or Orthodox Christians, and 7 percent are members of evangelical groups. The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Indigenous religious groups practice in rural areas. Indian nationals are the most significant non-African ethnic population and are primarily Shia Muslim or Hindu. There is a small indigenous Jewish community near the eastern town of Mbale.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The law prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion.

The government requires religious groups to register to obtain legal entity status. Larger groups, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Anglican Church, and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, obtain legal status by registering under the Trustees Incorporation Act. The

Ministry of Internal Affairs' nongovernmental organization (NGO) board registers smaller local religious groups, including evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Registration with the NGO board allows groups to access donor funding. The NGO board requires re-registration 12 months after the first issuance, 36 months after the second issuance, and 60 months after the most recent issuance for subsequent renewals. The penalty for nonregistration is closure of the organization.

In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum surveys world religious beliefs. Private schools are free to offer religious instruction.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including reports of detention. In addition, the government imposed restrictions on minority religious groups it defined as "cults."

On May 4, police in the Bugiri District arrested and later released on bail three suspected leaders of a religious group known as "Ngiri Ya Yesu." Police alleged that the suspects told their followers to refuse immunization and public education for their children. On May 21, the district state attorney's office dismissed the case, but cautioned the suspects to stop "inciting civilians against government programs."

The government granted most applications for legal status, but denied the applications of approximately 20 groups it considered "cults." The government defined a "cult" as a system of religious worship, often with a charismatic leader, which indoctrinated members with "unorthodox or extremist" views, practices, or beliefs. Between August 1 and October 31, the government actively monitored the activities of unregistered NGOs it defined as "cults," including Polo Manyen in Gulu District and the Abengeri in Luweero District.

The government continued to refuse to register the New Malta Jerusalem Church based in Agago District, citing "security reasons." The leader of the church is the father of Alice Lakwena, who led an armed rebellion against the ruling National Resistance Movement in the 1980s; this rebellion was the precursor to the Lord's Resistance Army.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and discourage discrimination.

On March 9, a lecturer at Masaka School of Comprehensive Nursing expelled two female Muslim students for wearing veils in class. The government did not defend the students. A school official stated that education ministry policy does not permit variations of the school uniform.

On September 24, the Joint Christian Council, an ecumenical faith-based organization composed of representatives of the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches, signed a memorandum of understanding to work with parliament to promote religious tolerance and peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and worked closely with religious leaders to promote religious tolerance and freedom.

On June 30, the embassy funded a second annual interfaith day of service, hosted by the Muslim Center for Justice and Law (MCJL) for more than 400 students. The event promoted interfaith

understanding. In August the embassy hosted 70 influential Muslim leaders, including imams, for an iftar to promote mutual interest and respect.

In September the ambassador spoke at the launch of the Human Rights and Multi-Faith Dialogue Training Manual, sponsored jointly by the embassy and the MCJL.

In October the visiting U.S. assistant secretary of state for public affairs participated in a radio talk show on the topic of "Muslim life in America."

In November the embassy hosted the launch of the Ugandan chapter of Generation Change, a global network designed to identify and empower young change-makers in Muslim communities and their peers worldwide. Members collaborate on community-based service projects, build bridges between people of different backgrounds and faiths, and counter narratives contributing to conflict and violent extremism.

Between September and November embassy officials engaged Muslim students nationally in a dialogue on tolerance.

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