

Rwanda (100)

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedoms during the period covered by this report. There were multiple reports that local authorities have harassed and detained members of Pentecostal and Seventh-day Adventist churches. The majority of those detained by local officials were released within weeks of their arrest. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to have trouble in some provinces with children being expelled from school. A number of religious leaders reported intimidation and harassment related to the referendum for the new constitution held in May. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve.

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 10,169 square miles, and its population is approximately 8.1 million. A 2001 study conducted by a foreign university reported that 49.6 percent of the population were Catholic, 43.9 percent Protestant, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 claimed no religious beliefs, and 0.1 percent practiced traditional indigenous beliefs. This study indicated a 19.9 percent increase in the number of Protestants, a 7.6 percent drop in the number of Catholics, and a 3.5 percent increase in the number of Muslims from the U.N. Population Fund survey in 1996. The figures for Protestants include the growing number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Protestant groups. There also is a small population of Baha'is and Jews. There has been a proliferation of small, usually Christian-linked schismatic religious groups since the 1994 genocide.

Foreign missionaries and church-linked nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of various faiths operate in the country, including Trocaire, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Federation, World Vision, World Relief, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Norwegian Church Aid, Salvation Army, African Muslim Agency, American Jewish Distribution Committee, Jesuit Relief Society, Christian Aid, Christian Direct Outreach, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, African Evangelical Enterprise, and Jesus Alive Ministries. Foreign missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs, and the Government has welcomed their development assistance.

There is no indication that religious belief is linked directly to membership in any political party. In fact, Article 54 of the new Constitution states: "Political organizations are prohibited from basing themselves on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion or any other division which may give rise to discrimination." Of the eight parties, the only one with a religious component to its name—the Democratic Islamic Party (PDI)—changed its name to the Ideal Democratic Party, in order to comply with the Constitution. However, the party has always claimed to have non-Muslim members.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, adopted in a May 26 referendum, guarantees freedom of religion. Article 33 states: "Freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, religion, worship and the public manifestation thereof is guaranteed by the State in accordance with conditions determined by law." However, while the

Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms. There is no state religion.

The law provides for small fines and imprisonment for up to 6 months for anyone who interferes with a religious ceremony or with a minister in the exercise of his profession. The law regulates public meetings, and calls for fines or imprisonment for those who violate these regulations.

Since the Government promulgated a new law in April 2001, giving it more influence over NGOs and religious institutions and organizations, the Ministry of Justice has registered 82 new religious groups. During the period covered by this report, no application was denied, although the Ministry reported that it suspended the status of two organizations that had split from already-registered religious organizations, for activities deemed political. Generally, however, no group's religious activities were curtailed as a result of difficulties or delays in the registration process.

There were reports that numerous religious organizations operate without legal recognition, because the process is arduous.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases, students are given a choice between instruction in "religion" or "morals." In the past, missionaries established schools that were operated by the Government. In those schools, religious instruction tends to reflect the denomination of the founders, either Catholic or Protestant. Christian and Muslim private schools operate as well.

The Government observes four religious holidays as official holidays: Christmas, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption.

The Government has not actively supported or participated in religious fora aimed at increasing interfaith understanding and support. In May, however, it did declare 3 days to be days of National Prayer. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve because of collaboration and dialog in the areas of education and reconciliation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government forbade religious meetings at night on the grounds that insurgents formerly used the guise of nighttime "religious meetings" to assemble their supporters before attacking nearby targets; however, during the period covered by this report, the Government allowed such meetings if religious groups provided advance notification. Religious leaders reportedly cooperated with the Government in limiting nighttime religious meetings and did not view the restriction as an infringement on their religious freedom. The Government continued to require religious groups to hold services at their established places of worship and to ban the use of private homes for this purpose. Some small religious groups that met in private homes were forced to move to new locations.

In February 2002, government authorities forbade Pasteur Bizimungu, a former president of the country who organized a political party that was banned by the Government in 2001, from attending public church services; authorities charged that Bizimungu's presence would be "divisive." The Government's action reportedly was politically motivated. On April 23, Pasteur Bizimungu was arrested on charges of illegal political activity. He has since been charged with threatening state security and financial improprieties. The Supreme Court rejected his latest appeal on July 30 and no trial date has been set.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Unlike the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports of Jehovah's Witnesses being detained or arrested for refusing to participate in nightly security patrols. However, according to church officials, in 3 of Rwanda's 12 provinces, children of Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from secondary schools for failing to attend school on Saturday. Church officials have raised the issue with national authorities, but for the moment, the children remain expelled, and are being educated at home. Local authorities in Kibungo, Gisenyi, and Butare Provinces all supported such expulsions.

There were reports of intimidation of church leaders prior to and during the May 26 constitutional referendum. Radio Rwanda, the government-run radio station, publicly denounced churches whose members abstained from voting. According to religious officials, Protestant church leaders were detained and interrogated by government forces when it was believed their congregations were not voting in favor of the new constitution. Members of a number of religious organizations reported that government agents escorted them to the polls, and watched while they cast their votes. Reports such as these came from persons in Butare, Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, Kibungo, and Buyumba Provinces.

On March 13, members of a Pentecostal church were arrested during a prayer service on Mt. Kigali. The group had gone into a cave to pray when local security forces arrested them. At the end of the period

covered by this report, the leaders of the group were still in detention.

According to several human rights groups, in November 2002, individuals who had split from a Pentecostal church and formed a new congregation were attacked outside their new place of worship in the Gikondo district of Kigali. On November 1, 2002, seven members were arrested and detained in the Gikondo district prison. They spent 15 days in prison before being provisionally released by the Kigali prosecutor. On November 15, 2002, members of the National Police and the Local Defense Forces harassed members outside the church. On November 22, 2002, approximately 40 Local Defense Force members and at least 2 police officers attacked church members around 8:30 in the morning. The Counselor of the sector accompanied the forces. Civilians reportedly participated in the attack as well, and no one has been held accountable yet for the attack. Intimidation continued through February, culminating in the arrests of the leaders of the church. They remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the last week of February, 10 members of a Seventh-day Adventist group were detained in Byumba for "disturbing public order." They were released on March 19.

In March 2002, the Government arrested Laurent Kalibushi, a dissident Catholic priest, and several members of his prayer group who were holding meetings late into the night in a private home in Kigali. Authorities charged that the prayer group, the Mouvement Sacerdotal Marial, was an "unhealthy and anti-social cult" with ties to the 2000 "doomsday cult" deaths in Uganda; a large cache of food and fuel found on the premises supported reports that the adults had stopped working and the children had stopped going to school. Some observers believed that the arrests were a result of the group's ties to the banned political party of former president Bizimungu. Approximately three members of the group, including Laurent Kalibushi, remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

In January 2002, police in Butare arrested three members of the Modest and Innocent Association (AMI), a local NGO, for publishing a newsletter calling for national reconciliation; authorities charged that the newsletter was an incitement to hatred. One of the persons arrested was released within hours of the arrest; the other two were detained for 1 month, after which they were released when a court determined that the charges were unsubstantiated. At the end of the period covered by this report, all three persons remained under government surveillance, and the NGO was not allowed to operate.

Unlike during the previous period, there were no reports that the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) troops and rebels from the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were targeting Catholic clergy for abuses. No religious groups reported any abuses targeted specifically at them, although several reported that armed soldiers pillaged and destroyed their property, forcibly dispersed religious services, and harassed religious leaders.

In April 2002, in Bakavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, RDF and RCD-Goma soldiers surrounded the congregations of several Catholic churches and forcibly dispersed and beat parishioners. There were no reports of similar incidents during the period covered by this report.

Some religious leaders were perpetrators of violence and discrimination, and several members of the clergy of various faiths have faced charges of genocide in Rwandan courts, in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, and in foreign courts, notably in Belgium. In February the ICTR concluded the trials of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and his son, Gerald Ntakirutimana. Both were found guilty of genocide, and both cases are under appeal. Of the 31 detainees awaiting trial at the ICTR, 3 were religious leaders during the 1994 Genocide—Hormisdas Nsengimana, Rector of Christ-Roi College; Emmanuel Rukundo, a military chaplain; and Athanase Seromba, a Catholic priest.

There were no reports of religious prisoners; however, some members of Pentecostal and Seventh-day Adventist churches were detained for "suspicious activities."

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.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Disputes between religious groups are rare; there are numerous associations and interfaith groups that contribute to understanding between the various religions.

Following the genocide in 1994, a number of citizens reportedly converted to Islam, either for protection or

in search of meaningful reconciliation. Conversions tapered off in 1997, and according to the mufti of Rwanda, the Islamic community has not seen any increases in conversions over the past year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with leaders and members of the religious communities in the country.

The U.S. Government has funded a number of programs that promote religious freedom and interfaith understanding. Working with the Mufti of the country, the Embassy oversaw the completion in May of the renovations of an Islamic secondary school in Kigali, a project funded by the U.S. Through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund, the Embassy sponsored a workshop on reconciliation through a religious organization. The U.S. Agency for International Development works with several faith-based organizations on health and agricultural initiatives.

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and small, evangelical Protestant groups, among others, to promote interfaith dialog and discuss religious freedom. In addition Embassy officers regularly met with local and international NGOs involved in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts that focus on religious tolerance and freedom.

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