

Somalia (45)

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There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Non-Sunni Muslims often are viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority.

The U.S. Government does not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation has limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 246,200 square miles, and its population is approximately 7 million; however, population figures are difficult to estimate given the instability of the country. Citizens overwhelmingly are Sunni Muslim. There are a small number of non-Sunni Muslims. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam is growing. The number of Islamic schools funded by religiously conservative sources continued to grow (see Section III).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom; there were some limits on religious freedom.

There is no central government. A Transitional National Government (TNG) has been headquartered in Mogadishu since October 2000, but it exercises little effective control over the country. The Transitional Charter, adopted in 2000 but not implemented by the end of the period covered by this report, establishes Islam as the national religion. A draft transitional charter under consideration at the Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference cites Islam as the official religion. Some local administrations, including the "Republic of Somaliland" and "Puntland," have made Islam the official religion in their regions. In 2002 Abdallahi Yusuf decreed that only Shafi'iyyah, a moderate Islamic doctrine followed by most Somalis, would be allowed in Puntland. Several days later, Puntland security forces entered several mosques in Bosasso to compel compliance.

The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of traditional and customary law (Xeer), Shari'a law, the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government, or some combination of the three. During 2002 Islamic courts and militias were absorbed by the TNG and ceased functioning. However, two new courts were established in Beledweyne, in the Hiran region, during the period covered by this report—one designated for the Hawadle clan and the other for the Galjecel clan.

In 1999 the Minister of Religion in Somaliland issued a list of instructions and definitions on religious practices. Under the new rules, religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion's permission to operate. The Ministry must approve entry visas for religious groups, and certain unspecified doctrines are prohibited. In Puntland religious schools and places of worship must receive permission from the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs to operate.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Local tradition and past law make proselytizing a crime for any religion except Islam. Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is prohibited by law in Puntland and Somaliland and effectively blocked by informal social consensus elsewhere in the country. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operate without interference, provided that they refrain from proselytizing.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Article 8 of the Transitional National Charter and Article 6.3 of the Puntland Charter prohibit torture "unless sentenced by Islamic Shari'a Courts in accordance with Islamic Shari'a law." Unlike in recent years, there were no reports that militias administered summary punishment. Islamic courts ceased to operate in 2002 and did not operate during the period covered by this report, with the exception of the two new courts in Beledweyne.

In early March, three Christian Ethiopian nationals were arrested in Hargeisa for allegedly proselytizing. A search of their home uncovered Bibles and tapes on Christianity, and they were deported to Ethiopia.

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

Non-Sunni Muslims often are viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority. There is strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced but not controlled by radical Islamists, such as El Wak in the Gedo region and Doble, Ras Chaimboni, and Kulbiyow in the Lower Juba region. Organized Islamic groups whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state include Al-Islah, which openly operates primarily in Mogadishu, and Al-Ittihaad. During the mid-1990s, Al-Ittihaad was organized and operated training camps; however, while it continued to have adherents throughout the country, it did not have a central structure during the year. During the period covered by this report, the influence of radical Islamic groups continued to dissipate.

The number of externally funded Koranic schools continued to increase throughout the country during the period covered by this report. These schools are inexpensive and provide basic education; however, there were reports that these schools required the veiling of small girls, as well as requiring other conservative Islamic practices not normally found in the local culture. Mogadishu University, the University of East Africa in Bosaso, Puntland, and many secondary schools in Mogadishu are externally funded and administered through organizations affiliated with the conservative Islamic organization Al-Islah. The number of madrassas, which are private schools providing both religious and secular education, continued to increase during the period covered by this report.

There is a small, low-profile Christian community. Christians, as well as other non-Muslims who proclaim their religion, sometimes face societal harassment.

There are no ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater religious tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government does not maintain an official presence in the country. This lack of diplomatic representation has limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom.

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