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U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Rwanda

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Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. There is no state religion.

The Government requires non-profit organizations, including religious groups, to register with the Ministry of Justice to acquire "juridical existence." This registration is generally routine and not burdensome. Relevant legislation makes no provision for tax-exempt status for such organizations. Failure to register leaves an organization unable to sign agreements with other organizations, including agreements to receive assistance.

Many citizens regularly attend religious services. A 1996 socio-demographic survey by the Ministry of Finance, the Government's Population Office, and the U.N. Population Fund reported that 57.2 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, 24 percent as Protestant, 10.4 percent as Adventist, 1.9 percent as Muslim, and 4.5 percent professed no religion. There is a small community of Baha'is. A Muslim official noted in late 1998 that under the previous regime (pre-1994) some Muslims had hidden their religious affiliation to avoid discrimination in the workplace and schools, but that such discrimination was no longer a problem. He estimated that less than 10 percent of the population are Muslim. Foreign missionaries and church-linked nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) of various faiths operate in the country. The Government has welcomed their development assistance. Missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs.

There is no indication that religious belief is directly linked to membership in any party; the only party with a religious component to its name--the Democratic Islamic Party--claims to have non-Muslim members. Following the March 29-31 elections for local committees, several of those elected who identified themselves as members of "Temperance" (reportedly an offshoot of the Seventh-Day Adventists) refused to take the oath of office because swearing was contrary to their religion. The Ministry of Local Administration offered to accept the oath with the deletion of the words "before God." Some of the "Temperants" accepted this arrangement and took office. A few refused and new elections were held to replace them.

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

In early 1999, members of "Temperance" in the northwest part of the country urged the population not to move into villages, join local defense units, or participate in development projects, presumably on religious grounds. Prefecture officials threatened to arrest those "Temperance" members for interfering with government operations. A few were detained briefly and released.

A Catholic bishop was arrested in April on charges of participation in the 1994 genocide. Several members of the clergy of various faiths are in jail on genocide charges. There is no indication that these detentions are linked to membership in or practice of any religion.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who were 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 II. Societal Attitudes

In their practice of religion, citizens generally tolerate those who follow other religions. Disputes between religious groups are rare.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials maintain regular contact with leaders and members of the various religious communities in the country.

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