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Uganda

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. However, as in the previous reporting period, local officials imposed minor restrictions on nighttime events to reduce violence and noise, which indirectly impeded some religious activities, and groups considered to be cults experienced extra scrutiny.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 93,000 square miles and a population of 31.3 million. According to official government figures, an estimated 85 percent of the country is Christian, 12 percent Muslim, and the remaining 3 percent follow traditional indigenous beliefs, Hinduism, Baha'i, and Judaism. Some Muslims and Christians believe that the Muslim community is larger than the government numbers reflect. Of the Christian population, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent, the Anglican Church has an estimated 36 percent, and the Evangelical and Pentecostal claim the rest. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are very active. The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Traditional indigenous beliefs are practiced in some rural areas and are sometimes blended with or practiced alongside Christianity or Islam. Indian nationals are the most significant immigrant population; members of this community are primarily Shi'a Muslim followers of the Aga Khan or practice Hinduism. The northern and West Nile regions are predominantly Catholic, while Iganga District in eastern Uganda has the highest percentage of Muslims. The rest of the country has a mix of religious affiliations.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

All new nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs' NGO Board. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government.

In 2006 Parliament amended and passed the NGO Registration Amendment Bill. The amendments include updating fines imposed on violators and providing the NGO Board with discretion over the duration and conditions of the permit, as well as various regulatory laws effecting NGOs in the country.

In December 2007 the regulatory laws were recalled from publication following complaints from civil society groups that they were not consulted. On January 15, 2008, the Government established a

committee to review the guidelines and regulations in consultation with civil society groups. Discussions on the review process were in progress during the reporting period, and the law remains nonoperational.

The process of registration takes at least 6 weeks. In practice, most religious organizations are granted permits; however, the NGO Board defers registration of some church groups for various reasons.

Community-based organizations that operate at the lower district level are not required to register with the NGO Board. Instead, they must register with the local district governments.

Private madrassahs and Christian schools are common in the country. In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools are open to students of other religious groups, but they usually do not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from their work duties during the month of Ramadan. The Government observes Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The law prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion or other similar division.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. However, as in the previous reporting period, local officials imposed minor restrictions on nighttime congregating to curb violence, criminal activity, and noise, which indirectly impeded the activity of some religious groups, and groups considered to be cults experienced extra scrutiny and restrictions.

Local leaders must recommend community churches in Kanungu District in order for them to gain registration by the NGO Board in Kampala. In 2006 the NGO Board deferred Isa Messial Congregations' application in Kampala in order to investigate alleged cult tendencies. During the reporting period, the group was not registered as investigations into its activities continued.

In December 2007 the Mbarara District Security Chairman and the Resident District Commissioner, Clement Kandole suspended night prayers in the District because of security concerns.

On November 31, 2007, district security officials blocked Severino Lukoya, leader of the New Malta Jerusalem Church, from opening a church in Gulu town. During the reporting period, the church remained unregistered for security reasons. Lukoya is the father of Alice Lakwena, the rebel movement leader who began the 22-year-old rebellion in northern Uganda.

In September 2007 police in Mukono District closed a mosque in Kiswera, on suspicion that it was associated with the Allied Democratic Front, a rebel group based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, authorities arrested and detained persons on basis of their religious beliefs.

On April 29, 2008, Kamwenge District Deputy Resident Commissioner ordered the arrest of 11 members of Nyangakaibo cult. The suspects were charged with holding an illegal assembly on April 30 and remanded in prison. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

On February 22, 2008, police in Pader arrested Severino Lukoya, the father of former rebel Alice Lakwena, and three of his employees for operating the unregistered New Malta Jerusalem Church. They were released on March 3. The Resident State Attorney said the group had no case to answer.

On October 10, 2007, police in Mbale arrested enjiri "cult" group leader Apollo Paulo Wazaba for

withdrawing his five children from school in protest of the issuance of identification examination numbers. On October 15, Wazaba was charged with five counts of common nuisance. The case was dismissed for lack of witnesses.

During the reporting period, the Government monitored minority groups, with particular attention to new religious groups that are perceived as cults, including the Nyangakaibo group in Kamwenge, in the western region of the country, and the enjiri groups in Mbale and Luwero Districts.

There were 11 recorded religious prisoners in the country.

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.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, there were no abuses committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the country. The rebel group was forced out of the northern region of the country by the military in 2005.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government, following Libyan President Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's remarks that the Bible was a forgery during a March state visit to Uganda, increased efforts to promote tolerance between Muslims and Christians to curb any potential backlash. President Museveni apologized to Christians on behalf of Qadhafi, and the Inter-Religious Council, which represents Catholics, Anglicans, and Muslims, expressed regret over the comment and encouraged dialogue and tolerance.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During the reporting period, there were reports of pastors extorting money from parishioners in two regions. **In July 2007 police opened a countrywide investigation into allegations of extortion and other activities by some religious leaders. There were no reports of the findings at the end of the reporting period.**

On January 29, 2008, police in Gulu arrested Pastor Mike Ocaka for allegedly stealing an estimated \$7,418 (12.5 million Uganda shillings) from parents, promising that he would offer vocational training to their children. Ocaka was charged with obtaining money by false pretence and granted bail on February 1.

On January 24, 2008, police in Mbarara District arrested House of Grace pastors Patrick Mucunguzi, Michael Katongole, and Joshua Keinarugaba for allegedly extorting money from sick members of the church's congregation. On January 28, the suspects were charged with obtaining money by false pretense and released on police bond; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In October 2007 three pastors at Healing Outreach Ministries lured more than 200 school-age children into captivity with promises of scholarships in a plan to attain money from a Canadian religious organization by presenting the children to the Canadians as orphans in need of support. Police raided the church, arrested the pastors, and freed the children.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Ambassador and other U.S. Embassy officials continued to dialogue with leaders of various religious

institutions including representatives of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, the Church of Uganda, the Catholic Church, and the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches.

The U.S. Embassy supported several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious leaders Initiative and Inter-Religious Council of Uganda.

The U.S. Embassy also sponsored outreach efforts such as the March 2008 visit of American Muslim imams. In January 2008 the office partially sponsored a Voluntary Visitors Program for a group of seven Muslims from the north.

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