

Rwanda (100)

**2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom:
Rwanda**

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes some restrictions.

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

Local officials on several occasions briefly detained persons who, on religious grounds, refused to participate in nighttime security patrols or cooperate in other government programs. There were unconfirmed reports that members of Jehovah's Witnesses were subject to harassment, arrest, and detention by authorities during the first 6 months of 2000. There was some tension between the Government and the Catholic Church over the trial of a bishop on genocide charges, and over the Government's continued determination to preserve some massacre sites in churches as genocide memorials. Relations among religions were generally amicable. Concern over the doomsday cult-related deaths in Uganda led the Government to caution local officials to watch for similar cults in Rwanda.

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. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion**Legal/Policy Framework**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes some restrictions. 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 Government requires nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, to register with the Ministry of Justice in order to acquire "juridical existence." This registration generally is routine and not burdensome. Relevant legislation makes no provision for tax-exempt status for such organizations. Failure to register leaves an organization unable to legally conclude agreements with other organizations, including agreements to receive assistance.

Religious Demography

A 1996 sociodemographic 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, 1.4 percent as Adventist, 1.9 percent as Muslim, and that 4.5 percent professed no religion. There is also a small community of Baha'is and several congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. There has been a proliferation of small, usually Christian-linked sects since the 1994 genocide.

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 linked directly to membership in any political party. Of the eight parties, the only one with a religious component to its name--the Democratic Islamic Party--claims to have non-Muslim members.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases, students are given a choice between instruction in "religion" or "morals." Many years ago, missionaries established schools that are now 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.

Governmental Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government forbids 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.

After the doomsday cult-related deaths in Uganda in March 2000, the Government cautioned local officials to be alert to similar cults in Rwanda. Following this caution from the Government, in April 2000, local officials detained nine leaders and members of a religious organization called the Evangelic Ministry in Africa and the World in Byumba prefecture, near the border with Uganda. This organization had convinced a number of persons to leave work or school and surrender their material possessions in expectation of an imminent second-coming of Christ.

Governmental Abuses of Religious Freedom

Local officials on several occasions briefly detained persons who, on religious grounds, refused to participate in nighttime security patrols or cooperate in other government programs. Among the detainees were adherents of "Temperance" and "Abagorozi," both said to be offshoots of the Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Several members of the clergy of various faiths, notably Catholicism, have faced charges of genocide in both Rwandan courts and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). In June 2000, a Rwandan Court found Roman Catholic Bishop Augustin Misago not guilty of all charges related to his actions during the 1994 genocide. He was released soon after the decision was announced.

Catholic officials have charged that the Government is prejudiced against the Church. Catholic officials also have criticized the determination of the Government to maintain some massacre sites in churches as memorials to the genocide, rather than returning the buildings to the Church.

There were unconfirmed reports that members of Jehovah's Witnesses were subject to harassment, arrest, and detention by authorities during the first 6 months of 2000. Despite these accusations, there does not appear to be a pattern of systemic government discrimination against any particular religious group.

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

Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been 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

Relations among the different religious groups generally are amicable. Disputes between religious groups are rare.

Section III. 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.

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