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Executive Summary

The transitional constitution stipulates separation of religion and state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of religious groups to worship and assemble freely, organize themselves, teach, own property, receive financial contributions, communicate and issue publications on religious matters, and establish charitable institutions. The government demolished a mosque built on government property by northern Muslims during the war for independence, and discussed compensation remedies with Muslim leaders for this and two other mosques demolished in previous years.

Christian and Muslim leaders regularly consulted with each other, and leaders of all major religious groups attended most public ceremonial events.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom through discussions and outreach with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society organizations. The embassy discussed the importance of religious communities in the country and the positive role they played in the peace process.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.6 million (July 2014 estimate). The majority is Christian. There are no reliable statistics on the number of Muslims or traditional religious minorities. Studies from the early 2000s estimated Muslims constituted between 18 and 35 percent of the population, but the number of Muslims has probably declined through migration to Sudan after South Sudanese independence in 2011. According to the general secretary of the South Sudan Council of Churches, there are seven principal Christian groups: Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Sudan Interior, Presbyterian Evangelical, and the African Inland Church. Smaller populations of Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Seventh-day Adventists are also present. A substantial part of the population in isolated parts of the country probably adheres to indigenous religious beliefs or combines Christian and indigenous practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The transitional constitution (TC) stipulates separation of state and religion. It prohibits religious discrimination, even if the president declares a state of emergency, and states, "All religions shall be treated equally, and religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes."

The TC provides for the right of religious groups to worship or assemble freely in connection with any religion or belief and to establish places for these purposes; solicit and receive voluntary financial contributions; own property for religious purposes; write, issue, and disseminate religious publications; communicate with individuals and communities in matters of religion and beliefs at national and international levels; teach religion or beliefs in places suitable for these purposes; train, appoint, and elect or designate by succession their religious leaders; and observe religious holidays.

Although there is no law mandating it, the government requires religious groups to register their organization with the state government and with the national Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare, and Religious Affairs. There are no benefits to registration, and the government does not specify any penalties for non-registration.

The TC specifies the regulation of religious matters within each state as the executive and legislative responsibility of the state government. It establishes the responsibility of government at all levels to protect monuments and places of religious importance from destruction or desecration.

The TC allows religious groups to establish and maintain appropriate faith-based charitable or humanitarian institutions.

The TC guarantees access to education without discrimination as to religion.

Government Practices

In November the Central Equatoria State government demolished one mosque in Juba. In previous years, the Central Equatoria State government had demolished two other mosques on government land. According to Islamic leaders, Muslim soldiers from the north, who came to South Sudan to fight during the war for independence, built these mosques in areas where they encamped, on land that did not belong to them. The South Sudan Islamic Council, the central coordinating body for Islamic groups in the country, worked with the Executive Office of the President, which acted as an intermediary with the state government, to discuss compensation in the form of new land, for the destroyed mosques. These discussions were ongoing at year's end.

Unlike previous years, imams and other Muslim leaders said Muslims did not face discrimination in applications for citizenship or other documentation. Some members of the Greek Christian community born in Sudan, who in previous years since independence had reported problems with their citizenship and documentation applications, stated they no longer faced these problems.

Public primary schools had a mandatory religious education course, and students could attend either the Christian or Islamic religion course. The Ministry of Education was in the process of developing a national curriculum that would include a course on religion. Details of the course or on when the national curriculum might be implemented were unavailable at year's end.

President Kiir held an iftar and offered the Ministry of Education's support to the Islamic community in building Islamic schools. Both a Christian representative and a Muslim representative read prayers at most official events, with translation from English to Arabic often provided.

Muslims in government included at least one governor and, through July, 17 members of the 332-member National Legislative Assembly (NLA). After the NLA dismissed 23 members in August, only 309 seats in the NLA were filled and the number of Muslim members was unknown.

A nonpartisan delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders accepted a government invitation to attend Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace talks in Addis Ababa on the country's civil conflict.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders engaged in an active dialogue. For example, Christian and Muslim leaders regularly called upon one another for discussions on such matters as what they considered appropriate and fair representation of religious faiths in the government.

Leaders from all major religious groups attended most ceremonial public events, including the opening of the National Assembly and Independence Day ceremonies.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador or Charge d'Affaires and embassy representatives held discussions with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society about the importance of religion in the country and highlighted its positive role in the peace process. The Ambassador or Charge d'Affaires met regularly with key religious leaders, including leaders of the South Sudan Islamic Council, the South Sudan Council of Churches, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Presbyterian Church, and the Catholic Church.