



29/7-04

Burundi

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Transitional Constitutional Act, promulgated in October 2001, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 10,747 square miles and its population is approximately 6.5 million. Although reliable statistics on the number of followers of various religions are not available, a Roman Catholic official has estimated that 60 percent of the population is Catholic, with the largest concentration of adherents located in the center and south of the country. A Muslim leader has estimated that up to 10 percent of the population is Muslim, a majority of whom live in urban areas. The remainder of the population belongs to other Christian churches, practices traditional indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of small indigenous groups not affiliated with any major religion, some of which have won adherents by promising miracle cures for HIV/AIDS and other ailments.

Foreign missionary groups of many faiths are active in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Transitional Constitutional Act, promulgated in October 2001, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A new bill that specifically guarantees religious freedom and details the registration and regulation of religious organizations was drafted by the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for registering religious groups. The bill has been approved by the Council of Ministers and has been sent to the National Assembly for consideration.

There is no state religion. The Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association with a religious nature must file the following with the Ministry: the denomination of the religious institution or affiliation, a copy of its statutes, address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative, all of whom must have completed secondary school and have no criminal records. If an association with a religious character fails to register with the Ministry, its representative will be reminded of the requirement to do so. If

the representative does not comply, the place of worship or association will be asked to close down. If it does not close down when ordered to do so, the representative of the religious institution or association can be jailed for a period of 6 months to 5 years.

The Government requires that religious groups maintain a headquarters in the country.

While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Government often waives taxes on imported religious articles used by religious institutions and also often waives taxes on the importation by religious institutions of goods destined for social development purposes. These exemptions are negotiated with the Finance Ministry on a case-by-case basis, and there is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

The heads of major religious organizations are accorded diplomatic status. Foreign missionary groups openly promote their religious beliefs. The Government has welcomed their development assistance.

The Government recognizes religious holidays of the Catholic Church, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saint's Day, and Christmas. There are no official Muslim holidays; however, Muslims can take Islamic holidays off from both government and private sector jobs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no known abuses of religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

On December 29, 2003, Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney was killed by unknown assailants near Minago, Bujumbura Rural Province. The motive for the attack is unknown; however, there is no indication that the attack was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim.

In August 2002, rebels from the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) in Kigihu, Rutana Province, reportedly killed parish priest Peter Tondo. The motive appears to have been robbery, and there is no indication that the killing was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim. There were no new developments in this case by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of the various religious communities. In May, the U.S. Government

funded a 3-week Catholic Relief Services' training of Burundian religious leaders in peace building and national reconciliation.

Released on September 15, 2004

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