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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Western Sahara

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

The constitution of the kingdom of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Moroccan government in the territory during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

Western Sahara has an area of 165,000 square miles and an estimated population of 450,000. A majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, the veneration of religious figures and the tombs in which they are believed to be interred.

There is a small foreign community working for the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Many of its members are non-Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Moroccan law prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims who adhere to the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam. The government did not apply this law during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the territory.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.