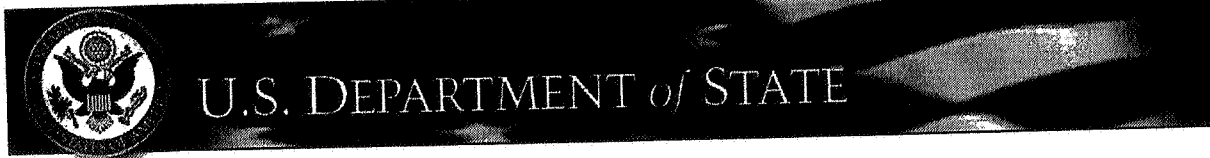


Ethiopian (19)

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Ethiopia

International Religious Freedom Report 2002 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. There were several reports of clashes between Muslims and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. While some Muslim leaders continued to complain that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam because they prohibited the wearing of headscarves in school, others accepted that school officials do so to keep better track of their students. Protestant groups occasionally complained that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches and cemeteries.

While the relationship among religions in society is generally amicable, there continued to be pockets of interreligious tension and criticism between followers of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, on the one hand, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, on the other. During the period covered by this report, a violent conflict broke out between Christians and Muslims.

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. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 699,946 square miles and a total population of approximately 63 million. More than 40 percent of the population adhere to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), the single largest religious group. The EOC claims 50 percent of the country's total population, or more than 31 million adherents, and 110,450 churches. The EOC is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara. Approximately 40 percent of the population is Muslim, although many Muslims claim that the actual percentage is higher. Islam is most prevalent in the Somali and Afar regions, as well as in parts of Oromia. Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism are the fastest growing faiths and constitute more than 10 percent of the population. According to the Evangelical Church Fellowship, there are 7.4 million Protestants, although this figure may be a high estimate. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus and Kale Hiwot are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR), western and central Oromia, and in urban areas around the country. There are more than 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics, Jews, animists, and other practitioners of traditional indigenous religions make up most of the remaining population. There are very few atheists. Although precise data are not available, active participation in religious services is high throughout the country.

In Addis Ababa and western Gondar in the Amhara region, there are very small concentrations of Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) and those who claim that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora). Approximately 3,000 Feles Mora migrated voluntarily from the western Amhara region to Addis Ababa in 1991 at the time of "Operation Solomon," when a large number of Falashas were airlifted to Israel. The Feles Mora also seek to immigrate to Israel. The number of Feles Mora in the country at the end of the period covered by this report was approximately 20,000. Israeli officials evaluate the Feles Mora immigration claims on a case-by-case basis and estimate that by the end of 2001, approximately 65 individuals were immigrating to Israel under Israel's law of return each week. The Israeli Embassy in Addis Ababa processed approximately 3,000 claims annually.

A large number of foreign missionary groups operate in the country, including Catholic and American Protestant missionaries. Protestant organizations, operating under the umbrella of the 12-member Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, sponsor or support missionary work: the Baptist Bible Fellowship; the New Covenant Baptist Church; the Baptist Evangelical Association; Mekane Yesus Church (associated with the Lutheran Church); Kale Hiwot Church (associated with SIM-Service in Mission); Hiwot Berhan Church (associated with the Swedish Philadelphia Church); Genet Church (associated with the Finnish Mission); Lutheran-Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia; Emnet Christos; Muluwongel (Full Gospel) Church; and Messerete Kristos (associated with the Mennonite Mission). There also is missionary activity among Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right. The Constitution requires the separation of religion and the state and prohibits a state religion, and the Government respects these rights in practice.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. Religious institutions, like nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), are registered with the Ministry of Justice, and must renew their registration every year. Unlike NGO's, religious groups are not subject to a rigorous registration process. Under current law, a religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO. Religious groups are not accorded duty-free status. Religious groups are given free government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries; however, the title to the land remains with the Government, and the land, other than that used for prayer houses or cemeteries, may be taken back at any time. Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. An interfaith effort to promote revision of the law in order for religious organizations to obtain duty-free status continued during the period covered by this report.

In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintains neutrality and tries to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders have requested the establishment of a federal institution to deal with religious groups. The Government considered the request; however, no action was taken to establish such a federal institution by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holidays, and continues to mandate a 2-hour lunch break on Fridays to allow Muslims to go to a mosque to pray. The Government also agreed to a request from Muslim students at Addis Ababa Commercial College to delay the start of afternoon classes until 1:30 p.m. to permit them to perform afternoon prayers at a nearby mosque.

When the Government began deporting Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in 1998, it decided that members of Jehovah's Witnesses who were of Eritrean origin, who might face religious persecution in Eritrea, were not to be subject to deportation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they are attached to the development wing of a religious organization.

Under the press laws, it is a crime to incite one religion against another. The press law also allows for defamation claims involving religious leaders to be prosecuted as criminal cases. In 2001 two journalists were detained and charged with defamation after writing articles critical of the EOC. Tilahun Bekele, publisher of Netsanet, and Daniel Gezahegn, deputy editor-in-chief of Mogedwere, were released on bail in 2001; however, the charges against them were pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Evangelical leaders have complained of strict regulations on the importation of Bibles, as well as heavy customs duty on Bibles and other religious articles; however, Bibles and religious articles are subject to the same customs duty as all imported books and most imported items.

While some Muslim leaders continued to complain that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam because they prohibited the wearing of headscarves in school, others accepted that school officials do so to keep better track of their students. Certain public school teachers in the SNNPR, Addis Ababa, and in the Amhara region objected to Muslim schoolgirls covering their heads with scarves while at school. According to Muslim leaders, school officials negatively react to the practice of fully covering the face and hands of female students. Muslim leaders stated that in some schools, Muslim girls go without head coverings in order to avoid similar problems.

The Government has interpreted the constitutional provision for separation of religion and state to mean that religious instruction is not permitted in schools, whether they are public or private schools. Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical, and Muslim-owned and operated schools are not permitted to teach religion as a course of study. Most private schools teach morals courses as part of school curricula, and the Government Education Bureau in Addis Ababa has complained that such courses are not free of religious influence. Churches are permitted to have Sunday schools, the Koran is taught at mosques, and public schools permit the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

Minority religious groups have complained of discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Protestant groups occasionally complain that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders have complained that because they are perceived as "newcomers" they remain at a disadvantage compared with the EOC and the Supreme Islamic Council when it comes to the allocation of land. The Supreme Islamic Council has complained that it has more difficulty obtaining land from the government bureaucracy than the EOC; others believe that the EOC is favored for mosque locations. While local authorities in the northern town of Axum, a holy city for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, continued to deny Muslim leaders' repeated

requests to allocate land for the construction of a mosque there, they have said that they will consider the request as soon as Saudi Arabian officials allow a church to be built in Mecca, a holy city for Muslims. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses have said that due to the lack of good donated plots in the capital, they have purchased their own.

In 1998 the Government returned Evangelical Church property that was seized under the Mengistu regime (including the Mekane Yesus Church headquarters, which served as Federal Police headquarters until 1997); however, the Government still has not returned other properties to the Mekane Yesus Church, including three student hostels and two schools. The Government also has not returned to the Seventh-Day Adventists properties taken by the prior regime, including two hospitals. The Supreme Islamic Council continued to try to obtain properties that were confiscated outside of the capital under the Derg regime. A March 2002 declaration by the Oromia Regional State Parliament called for the return of all nationalized property originally belonging to religious organizations; however, no property was returned by the end of the period covered by this report. Similar provisions were instituted in the Southern Region last year.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In January 2001, in Harar, a riot broke out between Muslims and Christians (see Section III); the army was called in to restore order and reportedly shot and killed five persons. Authorities detained 14 persons during the incident, and by the end of the period covered by this report, all of the 194 persons originally detained had been released. No action was taken against any of the army officers who were involved in the incident.

In December 2000, Samson Seyoum Kebede, the former editor of Goh, fled the country. In 1999 Seyoum was convicted on charges of incitement to war and attempting to spread Islamic fundamentalism; he was sentenced to 4½ years' imprisonment, but was released pending an appeal of his conviction. Under the Press Law, it is a crime to incite one religion against another.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Despite the country's broad level of religious freedom and tolerance for established faiths, there were instances of open conflict among religious groups before 1998. These occurred most noticeably between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians on the one hand, and Pentecostals and evangelicals on the other. In addition there continued to be pockets of interreligious tension and criticism during the period covered by this report. Members of newer faiths such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals have encountered overt opposition from the public. Muslims and Orthodox Christians complain about proselytization by Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses. Ethiopian Orthodox leaders complain that sometimes Protestants fail to respect Orthodox holy days and Orthodox customs. Muslims complain that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their services. There were complaints by Muslim leaders that the EOC's desire to "show supremacy" sometimes caused irritation in the regions.

In most sections of the country, Orthodox Christians and Muslims participate in each other's religious observances, and there is tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas, most notably in Welo, as well as in urban areas throughout the country. In the capital, Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths often live side-by-side. Most urban areas reflect a mixture of all religious denominations. Longstanding evangelical Protestant denominations, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church and Kale Hiwot Churches, provide social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members. However, there were several clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians over the allocation of land during the period covered by this report.

On August 4, 2001, in Addis Ababa, police ordered a group of Muslims, who had begun to construct a mosque without a permit on unfenced land near an Ethiopian Orthodox church on a Sunday, to stop construction until the next day. On August 5, fighting began after Orthodox Christians attempted to dismantle the mosque; several persons were injured. Construction at the site did not resume by the end of the period covered by this report.

On November 30, 2001, in Abbis Ababa, Muslims and Orthodox Christians began fighting after Christians in the community requested that the Muslim community demolish a mosque being built without a permit on a small soccer field. One person was killed, several persons were injured, and several persons were arrested. No further action was taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

On December 30, 2001, in Abbis Ababa, Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians fought over a parcel of land that both groups claimed to be their own. The disputed parcel originally was allocated to the Muslim community; however, no permission was given to construct a mosque on the property. After

2 years, the Muslim community began constructing the mosque at night without permission, which led to clashes with local members of the EOC. According to reports from the Islamic Affairs Council, 2 Muslims were killed during those clashes, and police arrested an estimated 100 persons. All of those arrested subsequently were released, and construction of the mosque did not resume by the end of the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, there also were clashes between Orthodox Christians and Muslims during processions celebrating the Ethiopian Orthodox holiday of Timket or Epiphany. For example, on January 19, 2002, in Kemisse, the capital of the Oromiya Zone in the Amhara Region, one person was killed during a clash between Muslims and Christians. According to police reports, they arrested several persons for organizing the disruption or throwing rocks at the procession; however, all of those arrested subsequently were released. It remained unknown who was responsible for the killing by the end of the period covered by this report. On that same day, in Jijiga in the Somali Region, there were reports of similar clashes during which several Christians reportedly were injured by rocks thrown by Muslims.

The Islamic Affairs Council estimates that 100 mosques were burned in the Oromiya Region during the last 3 years. The Islamic Council continued to investigate the fires at the end of the period covered by this report. Although the identities of those responsible is unknown or not released publicly, 12 executive members of the Oromiya branch of the Supreme Islamic Council were removed from their positions for not stopping the destruction of mosques in the region.

In January 2001, in Harar, a riot broke out between Muslims and Christians after several members of a Christian procession entered a mosque and disrupted Muslim services. Both groups accused each other of destroying religious property. After the local police no longer were able to control the rioting, the army was called in to restore order and reportedly shot and killed five persons; it was not known whether the rioters fired weapons in return. No actions were taken against the army, and the case officially is closed. In January and February 2001, the EOC and the Supreme Islamic Council worked together and with local, regional, and national level government representatives in Harar to restore relations between the two faiths. That interfaith council, which includes representatives from the Protestant and Catholic Churches in the area, continued to cooperate on issues including interfaith conflict.

In February 2002, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the chairman of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Church, and the president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus met with their Eritrean counterparts and officials from the Eritrean Foreign Ministry in Eritrea. The religious leaders then traveled to Ethiopia to continue their discussions. They issued statements appealing for peace and reconciliation between the two countries. The two groups of religious leaders also met in July 2002 and vowed to continue their work on this issue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy meets regularly with the leaders of all of the religious communities. Embassy officers made an active effort to visit all of the religious groups and religious NGO's during the period covered by this report. Embassy officers met with the Supreme Islamic Council, Serving in Mission (SIM), Mekane Yesus, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Catholic Church, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Ambassador continued to hold regular meetings with all religious leaders to promote HIV/AIDS awareness. In addition the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continued to work with the Ethiopian Orthodox Development Assistance Authority to provide food commodities and grants to support food security programs in four areas. USAID also supported a variety of programs through Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, and Family Health International. USAID also continued to work with the EOC and Mekane Yesus Church, and during the period covered by this report, USAID began programs with the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church and the Missionaries of Charity Sisters to support HIV/AIDS programs.

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