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## Congo, Democratic Republic of the

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report**

Report

**September 13, 2011**

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The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 905,000 square miles and a population of 70.9 million. The population is 50 percent Roman Catholic, 20 percent Protestant (including evangelicals), 10 percent Kimbanguist (a Christian-inspired Congolese church), and 10 percent Muslim. Other religious groups represented in much smaller numbers include Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Orthodox Christians, and Jews. The remainder generally practices animist indigenous religious beliefs. Nearly 90 percent of the population attends religious services each week.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims are mainly concentrated in the provinces of Maniema, Orientale, and Kinshasa. Members of the ethnically based spiritual and political movement Bundu dia Mayala (BDM), formerly Bundu dia Kongo (BDK), reside predominantly in the Bas-Congo Province. After significant persecution in 2008, the organization was forced to change its name and purpose; BDM has not been able to gain official recognition as a political association, although the religious branch of the group continued to meet in secret.

## 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>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government regularly consulted with Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Kimbanguist, and Orthodox religious groups. The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders served as an informal forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern.

The National Media Regulatory Authority may suspend broadcast stations, religious or secular, for broadcasting hate speech or calls for ethnic violence but not because of their religious affiliation. Various religious groups have their own radio stations. These include Radio Maria, a Catholic station operating primarily in Bukavu; the Catholic Radio station Radio Amani in Kisangani; and the Islamic community broadcasting "The Voice of Africa" in Kinshasa and Kikwit. Private radio stations in both Kinshasa and other major urban areas in the DRC and nearby Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of the Congo, broadcast programs heard in Kinshasa representing several Christian groups.

A statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utilities provides for and regulates the establishment and operation of religious institutions. Requirements for the establishment of a religious organization are simple. The government grants tax-exempt status to recognized religious organizations. A law regulating religious organizations grants civil servants the power to recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. Although the law requires officially recognized religious associations to maintain nonprofit status and respect the general public order, they can establish places of worship and train clergy.

A 2001 decree allows nonprofit organizations, including religious organizations, to operate without restriction provided they registered with the government by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. The government requires religious groups to register; however, in practice unregistered religious groups operated unhindered.

The government requires foreign religious groups to obtain the approval of the president through the minister of justice; such groups generally operated without restriction once they received approval.

Religious groups operated many public schools; the government allowed the groups to provide religious instruction.

The government observes Christmas as a national holiday.

### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

### Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country.

According to Zenit and Fides news agencies, on November 8, near Goma, North Kivu, two men in military uniforms stopped and killed a priest after taking money from the priest's traveling companion. The men had previously stopped others asking if they were priests. After stopping the victim and his companion, they asked which of the two men was the

priest and then shot him, leaving the other man unharmed. The incident was believed to be a targeted killing. According to *The Ottawa Citizen*, two soldiers were arrested on suspicion of killing the priest.

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On December 13 another priest was wounded and his wife killed in a targeted killing by unknown armed gunmen. The priest was in a coma after the attack in his home in Goma, North Kivu.

In April police arrested three Mormons in Kinshasa and detained additional supporters who protested the initial arrests. Political involvement by the church leader was cited as a possible reason for the arrests. All individuals were released three and a half months later, with no conviction or trial.

Although the government committed to a judicial investigation, there was no investigation into the 2008 police crackdown on the BDK in Bas-Congo, where police reportedly killed at least 100 BDK adherents and razed BDK houses and temples. The government did not take any further action in prosecuting those responsible for the attacks. The organization changed its name to Bundu dia Mayala and was pursuing political party recognition while quietly continuing its religious practices.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country.

### Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There continued to be credible reports that families abandoned or abused persons, including children, accused of witchcraft.

As in past reporting periods, there were reports of individuals attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes, accused of being witches. While "witch" is an imprecise term that is often applied to persons with developmental, behavioral, and psychological problems, there was a common belief that some persons have the power to cast spells on others or were possessed by demons. Persecution of these individuals is common following a death that family members attribute to the work of a witch. Accusations of witchcraft can cause widespread fear in a community.

On October 8 violence broke out between Muslims and animists in Kalima, Maniema, resulting in the burning of two mosques and the beating and lashing of up to 20 people.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy met regularly with major religious leaders to discuss relations with both the DRC and U.S. governments. The U.S. government Access English micro-scholarship program provided English language training to students in Qur'anic schools in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi and other religious institutions. The embassy's Information Resource Center also displays a number of key religious texts.

On September 7 the embassy co-hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) with national Islamic organizations. More than 100 people attended the event, including Muslims from the local and international communities and non-Muslim diplomats. In their remarks, the U.S. chargé d'affaires and Imam Cheikh Abdallah Mangala Luaba invoked President Obama's Cairo speech and shared hopes for a new beginning between the United States and the Muslim world.

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