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Malawi

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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

There were no documented cases of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, there were anecdotal complaints from religious minorities regarding limited employment and educational opportunities.

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 45,747 square miles and a population of 13 million.

Eighty percent of the population is Christian. Among the Christian groups, the largest are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. Muslims constitute approximately 13 percent of the population and the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. There are also Hindus and Baha'is, as well as small numbers of Rastafarians and Jews.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas.

Religious groups must register with the government by submitting documentation to the Ministry of Justice detailing the structure and mission of their organization along with a nominal fee. Once approved, a religious group registers formally with the Registrar General's Office. During the reporting period, there were no reports that the government refused to register any religious groups.

Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits. Missionaries and charitable workers pay lower fees for employment permits than do other professionals.

Public schools offer religious education. Christian-oriented "Bible Knowledge" courses and "Moral and Religious Education" courses (that include Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and Christian material) are available for schools. The Ministry of Education requires all schools to observe the right of students or their parents to choose their religious instruction; however, individual parent-teacher associations or school committees decide which religion courses to offer. Although the courses are voluntary, some Muslims continued to request that the Ministry of Education discontinue use of the "Bible Knowledge" course and use only the broader-based "Moral and Religious Education" course in primary schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarian leaders continued to complain of an unofficial ban on long hair in some public schools. Although there is no law relating to hair length, some schools prohibit long hair as part of their dress code.

Some Zionist (African Independent) Church members complained that government policies forcing them to seek medical care for their children are an infringement of their right to practice their religion freely. This was highlighted when an outbreak of measles led to compulsory immunization for minors in some parts of the country.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no documented cases of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, there were anecdotal complaints from religious minorities regarding limited employment and educational opportunities. Christians, Muslims, and Hindus often participated in business or civil society organizations together.

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.

During the reporting period, the embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials. Embassy officials hosted Eid al-Fitr dinners and a very successful Interfaith Dialogue Conference, which brought together more than 40 religious leaders to discuss human rights, tolerance, and other topics of common interest.

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