



## Sierra Leone

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

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 period covered by this report.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles and a population of 6 million. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) estimates that 60 percent of the population is Muslim, 20 to 30 percent Christian, and 5 to 10 percent indigenous and other religious beliefs, mostly animist. There are small numbers of Baha'is, Hindus, and Jews.

Many citizens practiced a mixture of Islam or Christianity with traditional indigenous religious beliefs.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement between regions by large segments of the population.

#### Section II. Status of 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 law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in all schools. Students may choose whether to attend the religious knowledge classes offered by the school.

##### *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 period covered by this report.

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

#### *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 Abuses and Discrimination**

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

The IRC, composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, played a vital role in civil society and actively participated in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. As in the previous reporting period, membership applications from Baha'i and Jewish representatives to the IRC were still pending. The council requires two-thirds majority voting to accept new members, and some council members remained reticent to accept new religious groups, citing resource constraints. The Chairman of the IRC, however, expressed confidence that new members would be admitted in the future.

### **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.

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