



Uganda

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom; however, some members of the more traditional religious groups accused certain evangelical groups of practicing "witchcraft."

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. It is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 93,070 square miles and a population of 28.1 million. Christians constitute approximately 85 percent of the population and Muslims 12 percent. A variety of other religious groups, including indigenous religions, Hinduism, Baha'i, and Judaism, are practiced freely and combined represent an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claim 36 percent. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are active, and their membership is growing. Muslims are mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also are represented among the Asian community. There are few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religious groups tended to be syncretistic. Deeply held indigenous beliefs were blended into or observed alongside the rites of other religions, particularly in areas that were predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several traditions were active in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors; however, in practice the local officials imposed minor restrictions on nighttime congregating to curb violence and noise, which indirectly impeded on the worship services of some religious groups.

All new nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that regulates and oversees NGO services.

On April 7, 2006, Parliament amended and passed the NGO Registration Amendment Bill. The amendments include updating fines imposed on violators and providing the NGO Board with discretion over the duration and conditions of the permit, as well as various regulatory laws effecting NGOs in the country. Although the law is in place, pending parliamentary approval of statutory regulations, it remains nonoperational.

The process of registration takes at least six weeks. In practice, most religious organizations are granted permits; however,

the NGO Board defers registration of some church groups for various reasons. Following incidents involving several religious branches and mass killings, local leaders have to recommend community churches in Kanungu District in order for them to gain registration by the NGO Board in Kampala. On December 8, 2006, the NGO Board deferred Isa Messial Congregations' application in Kampala in order to investigate alleged cult tendencies. The church was not registered during the reporting period.

Community-based organizations that operate in only one subcounty are not required to register with the NGO Board. Instead, they must register with the local district government. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that local governments closed down community churches for failure to register. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

According to the Uganda Revenue Authority, the Uganda Revenue Authority Act amendment was revised in June 2006, and religious organizations are no longer required to pay taxes on any properties that earn income. Permits are necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature.

Private madrassahs and Christian schools are common in the country. In public schools religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools are open to students of other faiths, but they usually do not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from their work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, during the reporting period there were reports that local government institutions took actions to restrict operation of religious organizations for security reasons. These measures were not aimed at religious organization specifically, as bans were issued to curb criminal activity and for noise abatement reasons.

National government policy did not include restrictions on religious freedom.

On February 5, 2007, the NGO Board wrote to the district leaders in Mukono to advise them not to register the "Hornsleth Village Project" (HVP) group. The district leaders complied. In October 2006 the Government suspended the HVP in Mukono District due to fears that citizens were being enticed to join a religious cult. The initial 108 members of the project were required to adopt the founder's name, Kristian von Hornsleth, in order to formalize their registration and receive benefits such as livestock. The members entered a legal name change process and received new identity cards.

On August 1, 2006, the Supreme Court in Kampala dismissed an appeal filed in March 2005 by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeking a ban on weekend classes at Makerere University. The seven-member panel ruled that the university's policy of holding weekend classes was "rational, fair, and proportional."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On September 21, 2005, a court acquitted Prophet Ssali Kilimba Mwaka on all charges of conducting an illegal society, practicing witchcraft, and being in possession of articles used in witchcraft. Mwaka had been apprehended by police in May 2005 in Mubende District; Mwaka was later released on bail. There is no specific law which prohibits the practice of witchcraft.

In 2005 police in Gulu arrested Severino Lukoya, the father of former rebel leader Alice Lakwena, and three other pastors for operating the unregistered New Malta Jerusalem Church. Authorities stated they were arrested because of their connection with Lakwena. On February 28, 2005, police released the four pastors with a warning. During the reporting period, the Government refused to register the New Malta Jerusalem Church for security reasons.

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 reports of tension within the Pentecostal church over questionable conduct by individual churches. For example, Pastor Simeon Kayiwa, Head of Namirembe Christian Fellowship Church based in Kampala, was accused by other churches of using witchcraft while performing pastoral work. On September 22, 2006, police and the Association of Born Again Churches Committee exonerated and cleared Kayiwa of the allegations.

As in the previous reporting period, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Uganda Joint Christian Council continued efforts to ease religious tensions and find lasting solutions to civil unrest and the insurgency in the northern part of the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Uganda Muslim Education Association; the Church of Uganda, the Catholic Church, the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, and the Uganda Joint Christian Council. The promotion of religious freedoms was a specific goal of these meetings.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue, forge interfaith coalitions to support peace building in conflict areas, and allow the Muslim population to voice its opinions on matters of bilateral interest. International visitor grants allowed influential Muslim leaders to travel to the United States, where they shared their experiences with fellow Muslims. The U.S. Embassy sponsored representatives of the Muslim American community to foster dialogue and understanding with Muslim Ugandans and share experiences as Muslims living in a pluralistic society. The U.S. Government worked with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas of northern Uganda.

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