



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Uganda

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, bans imposed by local authorities against nighttime religious meetings for security and noise abatement reasons were still in effect in residential areas of several districts.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some members of the more traditional denominations 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 its population is approximately 26.7 million. Christians constituted approximately 85 percent of the population. Muslims comprised approximately 12 percent of the population. A variety of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Judaism, were practiced freely and combined represented an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church had the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claimed 36 percent. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were active, and their membership was growing. Muslims were mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also were represented among the Asian community. There were few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions 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 denominations were active, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Church of Uganda (part of the Anglican Communion), the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

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. The law governing NGO registration was amended by Parliament on April 7, 2006. The amendments include updating fines imposed on violators and providing the NGO board with discretion over the duration and conditions of the permit. A broad coalition of NGOs pushed for more liberalizing reforms and petitioned the president to reject Parliament's amendment act. The NGO coalition argued that the continued presence of security agencies on the NGO board and the powers to limit the duration of permits provide the executive too much power to control NGO operations.

In practice, most religious organizations were granted permits. Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not refuse registration to any religious groups.

Community-based organizations that operate in only one subcounty were not required to register with the NGO board. Instead, they must register with the district government. Some local governments closed down community churches for failure to register. For example, on March 29, 2006, police in Wakiso District closed Entebbe Holy Fire Ministries Church for failure to register.

Missionary groups faced no restrictions on their activities. 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.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Uganda Revenue Authority had not implemented its decision to tax religious institutions'

surplus income that were not put to the common use of their congregations or to the good of society. Religious organizations are required by law to pay taxes on any properties that earn income.

Permits were necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature. Religious facilities were also required to meet building safety codes. On April 20, 2006, Kampala City Council sued the Cavalry Temple Church for failing to secure building approval and because its structure built largely of papyrus did not meet the building code.

Private Qur'anic and Christian schools were common. In public schools, religious instruction was optional, and the curriculum covered academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There were also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools were open to students of other faiths, but they usually did not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners were given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually were released from 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

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that local government took any new actions to restrict operation of religious organizations for reasons of security; however, bans against nighttime prayers in some local communities for noise abatement reasons remained in effect. National government policy did not include restrictions.

#### Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports that authorities arrested persons due to their membership in religious groups during the period covered by this report. In 2005, however, police in Gulu arrested Severino Lukoya, the father of former rebel leader Alice Lakwena, and three other pastors for operating the unregistered New Melita Jerusalem Church. The Government refused to register the organization for security reasons. On February 28, 2005, police released the four pastors with a warning. Also, on May 1, 2005, police in Mubende District arrested Prophet Ssali Kilimba Mwaka for conducting an illegal society, practicing witchcraft, and being in possession of articles used in witchcraft; Mwaka was later released on bail. On September 21, 2005, a court acquitted Mwaka on all charges.

In March 2004 armed gunmen at the Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe District killed an American missionary couple, Donna and Warren Pett, and a Ugandan student, Isaac Juruga. Police initially arrested five persons suspected of participation in the killings. The motive for the killings was unknown but may have been related to theft, local hostility to evangelical activity in a predominantly Muslim area, or a rivalry between two local clans. In 2005 six suspects were charged with murder and imprisoned in Arua District. On February 25, 2006, the six suspects escaped from prison and were suspected by police to have crossed into the Democratic Republic of Congo. Eleven prison warders in charge of the prison were arrested and charged by the Arua Magistrate's Court with negligence. At the end of this reporting period, the warders had been released on bond and were awaiting trial; the suspects remained at large.

There were no new developments in the case of eight Tablig Muslims arrested in 2004 for attacking an evangelical Christian outreach in Masaka District and for assaulting antiriot police that resulted in one civilian death and several injuries

The rebel organization Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was responsible for killing tens of thousands of persons in the past twenty years, kidnapping more than 20,000 children, attacking religious leaders and property, and causing more than 1.5 million persons to flee their homes and move to makeshift camps. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its efforts to stop the LRA insurgency through a combination of military action against the LRA, attempted negotiations for a peace settlement, and provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Inter-Religious Program, 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. government and embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council; the Church of Uganda; the Roman Catholic Church; the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda; the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda; and the Uganda Joint Christian Council.

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 issues 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. government worked with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas.

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