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Congo, Republic of the

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 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 132,000 square miles and a population of four million.

Approximately 50 percent of citizens are Christian. An estimated 90 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic; other Christians include Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. The population is 48 percent animist, and there is a growing Muslim community, estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most Muslims in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa, Lebanon, and North Africa. West African Muslim immigrants arrived mainly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a significant Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population is composed of practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs, those who belong to various messianic groups, and those who practice no religion. A small minority of Christians practice Kimbanguism, a syncretistic movement that originated in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool Region) have been associated with opposition political movements.

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 constitution specifically forbids discrimination based on religion.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. The government does not observe Islamic holy days nationally; however, it does respect them. Employers granted leave for those who wished to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups when applying for registration; however, the process is time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register included fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners; no criminal penalties were applicable. There were no reports of religious groups being singled out in this process during the reporting period.

Religion was not taught in public schools; however, private religious schools devoted class time to religious studies.

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.

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

In some forest communities, pygmy populations experience discrimination, causing them difficulties in obtaining education and employment. Pygmy populations also experienced intolerance for certain cultural practices, including animist religious practices.

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. These discussions included highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the president, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly.

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