

Custom Report Excerpts

Angola

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of religion. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting rigorous criteria. In April the Huambo provincial court convicted Jose Kalupeteka, leader of the Light of the World Church, and nine of his followers for killing nine police officers in a clash between police and members of the religious group in April 2015. The government stated publicly it was concerned about the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which the government said exploited vulnerable populations and threatened domestic stability. The government has not recognized any new religious groups since passage of a law on religion in 2004. While many unregistered religious groups continued to operate with tacit acceptance, the government continued not to take formal action to recognize many of these religious groups, including Muslim groups. During the year, the government attempted to bring unrecognized Christian groups together in associations that could receive government recognition en masse, requesting those groups actively support government requests and not engage in illegal practices. Some religious leaders, civil society members, and media outlets accused the government of trying to coerce religious groups to align themselves with the ruling party in exchange for authorization to operate freely. The government was also accused of destroying some places of worship in locations where it exercised eminent domain authorities to accommodate private development.

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations continued to criticize publicly the proliferation of smaller, unrecognized religious groups. Newer and more established religious groups traded accusations of corruption and profiting from their members’ personal assets. Governmental organizations as well as some religious associations called for all new religious groups to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations.

U.S. embassy representatives promoted religious freedom and tolerance with the government, encouraging government officials to allow all people to worship freely and to ease restrictions on the registration of new religious groups. The embassy also continued to monitor cases involving government tensions with religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 25.7 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2014 national census, approximately 41 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 38 percent Protestant. Individuals not associated with any religion constitute 12 percent of the population. The remaining 10 percent is composed of animists, Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups. According to the government, most Muslims are immigrants from North, West, and East Africa. There are approximately 350 Jews, primarily foreign residents.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and prohibits religious discrimination. The constitution requires the state to protect churches and religious groups as long as they comply with the law. The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, and worship and recognizes the right of religious groups to organize and carry out their activities as long as they adhere to the law. The constitution permits conscientious objections, prohibits questioning individuals about their religious beliefs for reasons other than anonymous statistical purposes, and specifies that religious rights may not be suspended even if the state declares a state of war, siege, or emergency. It recognizes the right of prisoners to receive visits from, and correspond with, religious counselors.

The religious freedom law requires religious groups to register for legal recognition from the state. Legal recognition gives religious groups the ability to purchase property collectively, use their property to hold religious events, exempt them from paying certain property taxes, and authorize the group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system. To apply for government recognition, a religious group must collect 100,000 member signatures from 12 of the 18 provinces and submit them to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The law also requires religious groups to submit documents defining their doctrine, organizational structure, methods of worship, and leadership, and the amount of time the group has operated in the country. While the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights is responsible for registration and recognition of religious groups, oversight of religious organizations is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture through its National Institute for Religious Affairs.

Religious instruction is not a component of the public educational system. Private schools are allowed to teach religion.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On April 5, the Huambo provincial court convicted Jose Kalupeteka, the leader of the Light of the World Church, and nine of his followers for killing nine police officers in a clash between police and members of the sect in April 2015. Kalupeteka was sentenced to 28 years in prison. According to official figures, 13 civilians were also killed in the clash. Opposition parties reported the clash resulted in a much higher casualty rate, but figures vary widely and remain unconfirmed.

On August 9, new clashes between police and Light of the World followers in Kwanza Sul Province reportedly resulted in the deaths of five sect members and three police officers. The media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported security forces confronted followers in the same area on August 13, resulting in an unknown number of casualties. The government stated the attorney general's office was investigating the case, but could not confirm if there were any casualties from the August 13 incident.

In August the government reported several other incidents involving the Light of the World Church and continued to state that some of the group's practices were destabilizing to social order, such as prohibiting schooling and vaccination of its children.

In July in Mbanza Congo in Zaire Province, religious leader Manuel Nvika was sentenced to three months in jail for disobedience and contempt of court after failing to remove a head covering during a judicial hearing after his group had split from the Christian Union of the Holy Spirit Church. Fifteen other followers were arrested during the trial for contempt of court after the judge ordered Nvika to uncover his head during the proceedings, an act the group stated it considered blasphemous.

In April the press reported that Jorge Mpata, a religious leader from the Evangelic Community for the Prosperity of the Souls, was arrested and charged with harboring illegal immigrants in the northern province of Cabinda. Mpata said his arrest was a result of his refusal to support the ruling party. Authorities subsequently banned his church. Civil society organizations reported the government has been pressuring churches to support the government in the lead-up to planned elections in August 2017.

The government stated publicly it was concerned about the proliferation of religious “sects,” some of which it said used methods that exploited vulnerable populations, especially the poor, and threatened domestic stability.

The government did not make progress on the issue of recognizing new religious groups. The government has officially recognized 81 religious groups, all Christian, but has not recognized a new religious group since 2004, when the current application system was created. A large number of groups continue to await recognition despite having submitted several applications for registration. In 2015, the government estimated that approximately 1300 religious groups were operating without government recognition, often providing education and medical care to their members despite no legal authority to do so.

In some instances, the government disbanded religious organizations and organizations operating without government recognition, and some religious leaders stated they had been the victims of politically motivated prosecution for various criminal charges both tied to, and sometimes unrelated to, the practice of their religion. The government, however, said it routinely worked with religious groups to bring them into compliance with local laws.

During the year the government led an effort to bring unrecognized Christian groups together in associations that could receive government recognition en masse, requesting those groups actively support government requests, such as calls to register for elections, and not to engage in illegal practices. The government approved the operation of three coalitions of Christian churches – counting numerous smaller churches among their members – as a way to allow those churches to operate legally. Members of the religious community in partnership with the government created two organizations – the evangelical Union of Churches of the Holy Spirit in Angola and the Protestant Christian Church Coalition of Angola – to legitimize smaller, unrecognized churches as affiliates of the umbrella group. Some religious leaders, civil society members, and media outlets accused the government of trying to coerce religious groups to align themselves with the ruling party in exchange for authorization to operate freely. Many groups also stated they remained unrecognized and the rigorous requirements imposed by the 2004 law discouraged them from applying for legal authority to operate.

The government continued not to recognize any Muslim groups officially, although the government did not force mosques to close, particularly in Luanda. Some members of the Muslim community stated the high threshold for obtaining legal status, combined with the fact the majority of recognized religious organizations were Christian, indicated the government opposed recognizing non-Christian religious groups. The Bahai Faith and the Global Messianic Church remained the only two non-Christian organizations legally registered. In the past, government officials had stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution.

The government was accused of demolishing religious places of worship in the Zango municipality of Luanda. NGO sources stated that, during a planned demolition of an illegally established housing cluster in Zango in August, government soldiers demolished three Catholic churches and threatened a priest who attempted to stop them. In addition, in Curoca municipality in Cunene Province, Church leaders and media stated the government destroyed places of worship as well as cemeteries. Local human rights organizations also stated the government destroyed some places of worship under eminent domain authorities while clearing large swathes of residential communities to make way for private development. According to media sources, much of the land forcibly taken by the government belonged to indigenous pastoralists in the southern part of the country. Church leaders publicly denounced the forced evictions by developers and businesspersons.

On July 20, Vice President Manuel Vicente reportedly called for closer collaboration and cooperation between the Catholic Church and the government to promote moral values, human rights, mutual respect, democracy, and good governance. The vice president stated this during his remarks at the opening ceremony of the 17th Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar in Luanda.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some leaders of legally recognized religious organizations continued to criticize publicly the proliferation of smaller, unrecognized religious groups. Governmental organizations as well as some religious associations called for all new religious groups to rejoin their “mother churches” or cease operations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy representatives engaged with government officials on religious freedom issues and encouraged them to develop regulations to expand the rights of citizens to exercise their religion freely. The embassy maintained regular contact with many religious groups, including some not legally recognized by the government, as well as faith-based NGOs.

Benin

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes a secular state and provides for freedom of religious thought, expression, and practice. All religious groups must register with the government. There were five deaths following the intervention of security forces in a dispute concerning the control of a mosque in Semere.

On the night of May 10, a group of Voodoo followers vandalized the Catholic prayer center of Notre Dame de Lanta in the commune of Klouekanmey in the southwestern part of the country. Residents of Save destroyed one of the mosques belonging to the Benin chapter of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association in Save, in the central part of the country. Several NGOs including UNICEF and Plan International raised concerns over the inability of individuals in Voodoo convents to leave or convert from the religious group. Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly and throughout the country.

Embassy officials engaged with imams and other religious leaders to discuss strategies to best promote religious freedom and tolerance in the northeastern part of the country. The embassy hosted an iftar for prominent imams and delivered a message of religious tolerance and concord.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.7 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2013 census, 48.5 percent is Christian, 27.7 percent Muslim (mostly Sunni), 11.6 percent Voodoo, 2.6 percent indigenous religious groups, and 2.6 percent other religious groups. The largest Christian denominations are Roman Catholic with 25.5 percent of the population and Celestial Christian with 6.7 percent. Groups each constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Methodists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Bahais, Baptists, Pentecostals, followers of the Family Federation of World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), and Eckankar followers. The census reported 5.8 percent declare no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice Voodoo or other traditional religions.

Most Muslims are concentrated in northern areas. The few Shia Muslims are primarily foreign residents. Southern areas are more heavily Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes a secular state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of religious thought, expression, and practice, consistent with public order as established by law and regulations.

The Ministry of Defense through its gendarmes, generally in rural areas, and the Ministry of Interior through the police, generally in cities, have the authority to intervene in conflicts between religious groups to ensure public order and social peace, provided the intervention complies with the principle of state neutrality in religious affairs.

Persons who wish to form a religious group must register with the Ministry of Interior. Registration requirements include submission of administrative materials (including the applicant's birth certificate, police record, request letter, copy of identification, and the group's internal rules) and payment of a registration fee of 50, 000 CFA francs (\$80). If a group is not registered, the Ministry of Interior will order the closing of the religious facilities until the group is registered.

By law, public schools may not provide religious instruction. Religious groups may establish private schools given the authorization of the state and may benefit from state subsidies.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Following a dispute between two relatives competing to become the imam of a mosque in Semere in the commune of Ouake, local authorities in October closed the mosque to allow for the two sides to come to an understanding. Supporters of the disputing parties, however, forced the mosque doors open for Friday prayers, according to the local police chief. Security forces intervened, resulting in five dead and many others injured.

On July 3, two factions of the Protestant Methodist Church of Benin signed an agreement that ended a 19-year-old feud between the two groups. Political leaders and media commentators attributed the agreement largely to President Patrice Talon's mediation efforts. The two factions disagreed over the ownership of specific properties, despite a court ruling in favor of one faction. President Talon coordinated and attended a church service on July 3 at the Palais des Congres in Cotonou where leaders of the two factions signed a memorandum of understanding on reaching reconciliation.

On the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, the government, supporting an initiative of the former ombudsman, officially launched a petition requesting that the UN Secretary General create an appropriate structure for interreligious and intercultural dialogue for peace. The initiative was a follow-up to the May 2015 international symposium held in Cotonou on the theme "African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue." Many local religious and political leaders committed themselves to this initiative and to implementing projects to increase religious tolerance.

Government officials attended inductions, funerals, and other religious ceremonies organized by various groups. State-owned television often broadcast these events. Police provided security for any religious event upon request.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of interreligious conflict that involved intervention by government security forces. On the night of May 10, a group of Voodoo followers vandalized the Catholic prayer center of Notre Dame de Lanta in the commune of Klouekanmey in the southwestern part of the country. According to media reports, the Voodoo followers accused the chaplain in charge of the prayer center with counteracting the efficacy of their rituals intended to make rainfall in the region. They reportedly also blamed the chaplain for angering their deity by building the prayer center and practicing Catholic rites in the area. Gendarmes intervened in the conflict to restore peace to the community.

Residents of Save destroyed one of the mosques belonging to the Benin chapter of the Ahmadi Muslim Association in Save, in the central part of the country. A larger mosque was erected on the site of the old mosque with foreign funding, but the Ahmadi community stated that they had no role in the new mosque.

Several NGOs, including UNICEF and Plan International, raised concerns about the inability for individuals in Voodoo convents to leave or convert from the religious group. International media sources reported that children were often abducted and forcibly enrolled in such convents and were sometimes restricted when attempting to leave. UNICEF reported 432 convents in five of 77 municipalities.

Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly. On May 14, the Ecumenical Foundation for Peace in Africa (EFPA) gathered religious and traditional leaders from Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, France, and Asia in the city of Azove. Participants made a pledge to advance peace in the country and in Africa by fostering interreligious dialogue. In a keynote address, the president of EFPA cited potential threats to religious concord in the country and called for concerted efforts to address them. The president of EFPA raised issues about conflict within the Protestant Church, minor conflicts between the Catholic Church and Voodoo followers, land disputes involving religious groups, among other topics. The event concluded with a parade and a concert in Azove to engage the local population.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

During the year, embassy officials met with imams and other religious leaders to encourage religious tolerance. On January 28, embassy officials met with representatives of the Framework for Interfaith Dialogue in Kandi to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. Discussions focused on strategies developed by the Framework to promote religious tolerance while countering the threat of violent extremism in Kandi.

On June 27, the Ambassador hosted an iftar for prominent imams and Islamic scholars. The Ambassador highlighted the importance of tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

Botswana

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, with certain exceptions, and protection against governmental discrimination on the basis of creed. The government deported a U.S. pastor from the Faithful World Baptist Church on September 20 for visa improprieties and for his participation in a radio interview during which he called for LGBTI persons “to be stoned to death,” statements the

government determined to be “hate speech.” The government denied long-term residence permits for missionaries of some religious groups, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy engaged with the government at high levels regarding residency permits for missionaries and religious freedom generally.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.2 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census reporting on the population 12 years and over, 79 percent of citizens are members of Christian groups, 15 percent espouse no religion, 4 percent are adherents of the Badimo traditional indigenous religious group, and all other religious groups comprise less than 1 percent of the population.

Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baptists, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and members of other Christian denominations. According to the 2011 census, there are approximately 11,000 Muslims, many of whom are of South Asian origin. There are small numbers of Hindus and Bahais, as well as a small Jewish community. Immigrants and foreign workers are more likely to be members of non-Christian religious groups than are native-born citizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Under its broader protections of freedom of conscience, the constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, the right to change religion or belief, and the right to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The constitution permits the government to restrict these rights in the interest of protecting the rights of other persons, national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health when the restrictions are deemed “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” The government has never exercised this provision. The constitution’s provision of rights also prohibits discrimination based on creed.

The constitution permits every religious group to establish places for religious instruction at the group’s expense. The constitution prohibits requiring religious instruction, as well as requiring participation in religious ceremonies in a religion other than one’s own. The constitution also prohibits compelling an individual to take an oath that is contrary to that individual’s religious beliefs. The penal code criminalizes “hate speech” towards any person or group based on “race, tribe, place of origin, color or creed” with a maximum fine of 500 pula (BWP) (\$47).

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the registrar of societies section of the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs. A group must register to conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account at a local bank. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to BWP 1,000 (\$94) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered group is subject to penalties including fines up to BWP 500 (\$47) and up to three years in prison.

Senior government officials indicated the country changed its policy to eliminate long-term residence permits for all religious workers; the policy change was not announced publicly until November.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

As of the end of the year, an amendment passed in March 2015 raising the minimum membership threshold for registration for new religious groups from 10 to 250 members had not been implemented as it was pending presidential assent. Previously registered groups were not affected by the amendment.

Optional religious education remained part of the curriculum in public schools; this curriculum continued to emphasize Christianity but also addressed other religious groups in the country. Government regulation of private schools did not distinguish among Christian, Muslim, or secular schools.

Some registered Christian organizations reported some of their missionaries had difficulty obtaining residence permits for missionary work. For example, the government denied multiple applications for residence permits to Mormon missionaries, continuing a pattern that started in October 2013. The Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs attributed this difficulty to unspecified “security issues.” President Ian Khama expressed concern about unregulated and unscrupulous churches coming into the country to take advantage of local citizens. There were anecdotal reports of pastors, including some from other African countries, demanding tithes and donations for routine services or special prayers.

The government deported a U.S. pastor from the Faithful World Baptist Church on September 20 for visa improprieties and for what the government determined to be “hate speech” during the pastor’s participation on a live radio interview earlier that morning. In the radio interview, the pastor called for LGBTI persons “to be stoned to death.” President Khama ordered the pastor’s immediate deportation stating, “We do not want hate speech in this country.”

Although it was common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups occasionally led prayers as well.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and senior Department of State officials engaged the president, vice president, and relevant ministries at the highest level, urging greater transparency on resident permit regulations for missionaries and advocating on behalf of religious freedom generally.

After the U.S. pastor’s September deportation, the embassy hosted a media roundtable underscoring U.S. support for freedom of speech and religion, as well as the human rights of LGBTI persons.

Burkina Faso

Executive Summary

The constitution states the country is a secular state, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. The government subsidized travel costs for Muslim Hajj pilgrims and allocated subsidies to the four main religious communities. In August the High Council of Communication (CSC) summoned and questioned executives from the Al Houda and Femina FM radio stations for content it stated was “undermining the principle of religious tolerance.” The government appointed representatives of the main religious communities to be part of the commission in charge of drafting a new constitution.

On January 15, gunmen armed with heavy weapons attacked a restaurant and two hotels in Ouagadougou, killing 30 and wounding more than 50. A counterattack by Burkinabe and international forces killed three attackers and freed 176 people who had been trapped in one of the hotels. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attacks, which they described in a statement as being targeted against the “enemies of religion.”

In July, in a land-related dispute between the Muslim community and the Siamou ethnic group in Orodara, young people looted and vandalized a Sunni mosque on the disputed land.

Embassy staff regularly discussed incidents affecting religious freedom with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, including the incident in Orodara. The U.S. embassy organized a roundtable on religious freedom in September to promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue. Embassy officers also met with religious leaders to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 19.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2006 census, 61 percent of the population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni, 19 percent is Roman Catholic, 4 percent belong to various Protestant groups, and 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs. Less than 1 percent is atheist or belongs to other religious groups. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Muslims and Christians often adhere simultaneously to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced throughout the country, especially in rural communities. The capital has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. There is no significant correlation between religious affiliation, ethnicity, or political or socio-economic status.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is secular, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. The constitution states freedom of belief is subject to respect for law, public order, good morals, and “the human person.” Political parties based on religion, ethnicity, or regional affiliation are forbidden.

The law allows all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, which is in charge of religious affairs. The ministry, through the Directorate for Customary Affairs and Worship, monitors the implementation of standards for burial, exhumation, and transfer of the remains; helps organize religious pilgrimages; promotes and fosters interreligious dialogue and peace; and develops and implements measures for the erection of places of worship and the registration of religious organizations and religious congregations. The registration process usually takes approximately three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA francs (\$80). Registration confers legal status but no specific obligations or benefits. Religious organizations are not required to register, but when they do so, failure to comply with applicable regulations required by all registered organizations may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$80 to \$240).

Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify they are in accordance with the nature of the religious group as stated in their registration.

Religious teaching is not allowed in public schools. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate private primary and secondary schools and some schools of higher education. By law, schools (religious or otherwise) must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools with the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, but the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The National Observatory of Religious Facts (ONAFAR), an organization created by the government to “monitor regulations on cultural practices” and promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue, continued to monitor religious communities and cultural practices. Along with monitoring, the ONAFAR played a mediator role within the religious community. In August the ONAFAR monitored a dispute among members of the Federation of Burkina Islamic Associations (FAIB), an organization intended to unite Muslim organizations in Burkina Faso, on the renewal of their leadership.

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications, according to religious group leaders.

The government did not fund religious schools or require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. Likewise, the government taxed religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production. The government reviewed the curricula of religious schools to ensure they offered the full standard academic curriculum; however, the majority of Quranic schools were not registered, and thus their curricula were not reviewed.

The government allocated 75 million CFA francs (\$120,000) each to the Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and traditional animistic communities. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, the government could provide an additional subsidy when the religious community or organization pursued a mission of general interest, such as education, health, or vocational training; when the religious community conducted an activity of national interest, such as promoting peace or social stability; or when the success or failure of an activity could have affected a significant part of the population, as in the case of religious pilgrimages. For example, in September the government allocated approximately 1.1 billion CFA francs (\$1.76 million) to subsidize the cost of the pilgrimage of the 5,500 Muslims going on the Hajj. The government also provided funding to registered Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim (commonly referred to as “Franco-Arab”) schools through subsidies for teacher salaries, which were typically less than those of public school teachers.

In March the government established a constitutional commission to draft a new constitution. Of the 92 members appointed in June, six were representatives of the main religious communities.

The ethics commission of the High Council of Communication (CSC), the governmental body in charge of regulating media, summoned and questioned officials of the Al Houda and Femina FM radio stations on August 12 for content it stated was “undermining the principle of religious tolerance” and violating the terms of agreements signed between the CSC and media organizations. According to the CSC, Al Houda and Femina FM broadcast “offending” sermons. The government stated the broadcasts in question provided a comparative analysis of Islam and other religions with a “strong tendency to denigrate other religions, including Christianity.” The media executives present at the hearing reportedly indicated to the CSC they had not listened to the sermons in question beforehand and pledged to take steps to prevent such content in the future.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

On January 15, gunmen armed with heavy weapons attacked a restaurant and two hotels in Ouagadougou, killing 30 and wounding more than 50. A counterattack by Burkinabe and international forces killed three attackers and freed 176 people who had been trapped in one of the hotels. AQIM and Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attacks, which they described in a statement as being targeted against the “enemies of religion.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In July in the midst of a years-long dispute and an ongoing legal battle between the Muslim community and members of the Siamou ethnic group about ownership of a plot of land in Orodara, a group of Siamou youths looted and vandalized a Sunni mosque located on the disputed land. According to media reports, a recent addition to the mosque, built on land the Siamou community reportedly considered sacred, triggered the incident. Local and national authorities attempted unsuccessfully to mediate between the two groups. In August the minister of territorial administration, decentralization, and internal security met with delegations of the FAIB and ONAFAR to discuss the dispute in Orodara and encourage the parties to find a peaceful resolution. Both delegations stated they welcomed the initiative of the minister and said they were committed to bring key actors together to find “consensual and durable solutions.”

Members of the Burkinabe Muslim Community Organization, the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, and the (Protestant) Federation of Evangelical Churches stated religious tolerance was widespread and numerous examples existed of families of mixed faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy staff regularly discussed incidents affecting religious freedom with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, including the incident in Orodara.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met separately with Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders throughout the country, at the local and national levels, to encourage their efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and advocate for religious tolerance and freedom.

The embassy organized a roundtable on religious freedom on September 15. Guests included two representatives of each of the Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities; the director of religious affairs at the Ministry of Territorial Administration,

Decentralization, and Internal Security; the president of the ONAFAR; and two journalists. The discussion focused on the participants' views of the state of religious freedom in the country, ways to promote interfaith dialogue, and how to maintain peaceful coexistence among the various religious communities.

Burundi

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience and religion. It prohibits political parties from preaching religious violence or hate. During the year, government officials and Catholic Church representatives exchanged words publicly that implicitly or explicitly criticized the other. In March the media reported the National Assembly President accused the Catholic Church of playing a “purely political, not spiritual role” and said the government would not talk to “sponsors of terrorism.” Several months later the National Assembly president publicly sought a rapprochement with the Church. In June the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi issued a message that suggested ways to resolve the political crisis that followed the president’s controversial bid for a third term in 2015; in response, the ruling party issued a strong counterstatement. All of the followers of a woman who reported experiencing visitations from the Virgin Mary were released from custody by the end of the year. Three local priests who fled the country in April 2015 following anonymous death threats accusing them of supporting an insurgency against the government had not returned at year’s end.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy continued to engage with actors representing various religions and encourage broad based religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.1 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2008 national census, 62 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 21.6 Protestant, 2.5 Muslim, and 2.3 Adventist. Another 6.1 percent have no religious affiliation and 3.7 percent belong to indigenous religious groups. The Muslim population lives mainly in urban areas, and the head of the Islamic Community of Burundi (COMIBU) estimates Muslims constitute closer to 10-12 percent of the population. Most Muslims are Sunni. There are some Shia Muslims and also a small Ismaili community. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent include Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox Christians, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Hindus, and Jains.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes a secular state, prohibits religious discrimination, recognizes freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and provides for equal protection under the law regardless of religion. These rights may be limited by law in the general interest or to protect the rights of others, and may not be abused to compromise national unity, independence, peace, democracy, or the secular nature of the state, or to violate the constitution. The constitution prohibits political parties from preaching religious

violence, exclusion, or hate.

The government recognizes and registers religious groups through its law covering nonprofit organizations, which states these organizations must register with the Ministry of Interior. Each religious group must provide the denomination or affiliation of the institution, a copy of its bylaws, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local institution is part of a larger group, and the names and addresses of the association's governing body and legal representative. Registration also entails identifying any property and bank accounts owned by the religious group. The ministry usually processes registration requests within two to four weeks. Leaders of religious groups who fail to comply or who practice in spite of denial of their registration are subject to six months' to five years' imprisonment.

The law does not generally grant tax exemptions or other benefits to religious groups. Some religious and nonreligious schools have signed agreements with the government entitling them to tax exemptions when investing in infrastructure or purchasing school equipment and educational materials.

According to the Ministry of Education, the official education program includes religion and morality classes in the curriculum for all secondary and primary schools. The program offers religious classes for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, although all classes may not be available if the number of students interested is insufficient in a particular school. Students are free to choose from one of these three religion classes or attend morality classes instead.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In March media sources reported President of the National Assembly Pascal Nyabenda accused the Catholic Church of playing a "purely political, not spiritual role" and said the government would not talk to "sponsors of terrorism." A representative of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa denied the Church was sponsoring violence and said government critics should not be deemed "terrorists." In November Nyabenda publicly sought a rapprochement with the Church, appearing before thousands of church-goers in Bujumbura and asking for the Church's assistance in engaging with international donors to encourage them to provide assistance to the country. He also asked the Church to support the government's efforts to repatriate refugees.

In June the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi (CCBB) issued a message read in all churches that expressed compassion for what they said were those who were suffering as a result of President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term in 2015 and suggested ways forward. The CCBB characterized the president's third term as a political crisis in the wake of killings, property destruction, thefts, exile, and economic deterioration. Their suggestions included ways to resolve the political crisis. The ruling party issued a counterstatement, which Catholic Church officials stated they perceived as an attempt to deter the Church from preaching freely on sensitive issues.

All of Eusebie Ngendakumana's followers detained in prison were released after varying lengths of time in custody, according to Ngendakumana's lawyer. Ngendakumana was accused of leading an unrecognized cult that formed after she reported seeing visions of the Virgin Mary in 2013. She was, however, never formally charged with any crime. Forty of her followers were convicted of rebellion against administrative orders and sentenced to prison from six months to five years. According to their lawyer, a number of those convicted were freed before the expiration of their sentences if they pledged to refrain from going on a pilgrimage to the location where the Virgin Mary was said to appear. Ngendakumana reportedly fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo with many of her followers in 2015.

A Catholic representative reported the University of Burundi chaplain and two other priests who fled the country in April 2015 had not returned as of the end of the year. The three fled after receiving anonymous death threats accusing them of supporting an insurgency against the government. The chaplain provided moral support to, and helped identify temporary shelter for, approximately 600 university students who sought refuge outside the U.S. embassy in April 2015 after authorities closed the university (including their housing) amid protests and violence related to the president's re-election bid.

The government administration comprised both Christian and Muslim officials. The president was a Protestant while several prominent members of his cabinet were Catholic or Muslim.

Government benefits – such as tax waivers – were granted to religious groups for the acquisition of materials to manage development projects. According to the Burundi Revenue Authority, the Catholic Church was granted a tax waiver in August for the import of a car for one of its seminaries and another tax waiver was granted in October for construction materials for Office of the Development of the Archdiocese of Gitega, one of the Church's development agencies.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy continued to encourage and support broad based religious tolerance and dialogue.

The embassy encouraged societal leaders to support religious tolerance and promote interfaith discussion of the collaborative role religious groups could play in disseminating a message of peace and tolerance to the population.

Cabo Verde

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion. The law provides for freedom of religion and worship and provides for equal rights in accordance with the constitution and international law. The government grants privileges to the Roman Catholic Church not received by other groups, under a 2014 concordat with the Holy See. This agreement, among other things, recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law. Muslim community leaders expressed concerns regarding the “nonlegalization” of mosques in the country, and restrictions on their ability to visit prisons Fridays in order to meet with Muslim prisoners for prayers.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy reiterated the importance of respecting religious freedom in discussions with government officials and members of civil society, including religious leaders, and through use of social media.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 553,000 (July 2016 estimate). The national government's statistics indicate 77

percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, 2 percent Muslim, and 1 percent does not identify with any religion. The second largest Christian denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other Christian denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Bahai and Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states freedom of conscience, religion, and worship are inviolable rights and protects the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion, and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. It provides for the separation of religion and state and prohibits the state from imposing religious beliefs and practices on individuals. It prohibits political parties from adopting names associated with particular religious groups. The constitution prohibits ridiculing religious symbols or practices. Rights may only be suspended in a state of emergency or siege under the constitution.

Violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to penalties of between three months and three years in prison.

The law codifies the constitution's religious freedom provisions by providing for equal rights and guarantees for all religions in accordance with the constitution and international law. The law separates religion and state, but allows the government to sign agreements with religious entities on matters of public interest. Specific sections of the law guarantee the protection of religious heritage, the right to religious education, freedom of organization of religious groups, and the free exercise of religious functions and worship.

A 2014 concordat between the government and the Holy See recognizes the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely. The concordat further recognizes Catholic marriages under civil law, the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts Church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the Church tax deductible.

The law requires all associations, whether religious or secular, to register with the Ministry of Justice. The constitution states an association may not be armed; be in violation of penal law; or promote violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship. To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Failure to register does not result in any restriction of religious practice, but registration provides additional benefits such as exemptions from national, regional, and local taxes and fees. Registered religious groups may receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Legally registered churches and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government continued to grant privileges to the Catholic Church that other groups did not receive including in educational institutions, in government facilities, and in access to media. Some minority religious groups said this practice strengthened the perception the government favored the Catholic Church as the “official religion” over other religious groups. The government used Catholic Church representatives to inaugurate public buildings throughout the country. Public television transmitted religious programming paid for by the Catholic Church, most of which was of Catholic services. A Brazilian-owned television network (TV Record) covered the religious activities of the Universal Church. Other religious groups received minimal TV broadcast time reportedly because they did not request it or had no means to pay for it.

Muslim community leaders expressed concerns regarding the “nonlegalization” of mosques in the country, referring to the cases of individuals intending to open mosques in their residences and mentioned the existence of some restrictions when requesting visits to prisons in order to meet with Muslim prisoners. Prison authorities did not grant some requests to visit on Fridays to meet with prisoners and hold Friday prayers. Muslim leaders stated the registration process was straightforward.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives promoted religious freedom in discussions with government officials at all levels, including the minister of parliamentary affairs (responsible for issues related to religion). After meeting with Islamic community representatives, embassy officials addressed issues raised in the meeting, including establishment of mosques and prison visits, with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice. The embassy also spoke with civil society representatives regarding religious freedom. Embassy representatives reiterated the importance of respecting religious freedom in formal meetings with the Catholic Church, the Muslim community, and the Church of the Nazarene, among others. The embassy also used social media channels to raise awareness about the need to protect religious freedom.

Cameroon

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits religious harassment, and provides for freedom of religion and worship. During the year, the government implemented a series of measures, which it stated it took to preserve order within religious groups undergoing internal disputes. These included instances where internal disputes within Christian communities over the creation of new ecclesiastical districts and church leadership prompted the government to close the churches temporarily. The government encouraged religious groups to find concerted solutions to their problems and held a senior divisional officer responsible for harassing a cleric. Authorities initiated a survey of religious groups operating in the country and anticipated that the outcome could lead to the authorization of new religious organizations and the closure of previously authorized groups. Authorities did not officially lift the ban on full-face Islamic veil implemented in the Far North Region after July 2015 terrorist attacks but the government did not enforce the ban.

Boko Haram carried out a series of violent attacks, including suicide bombings, against civilians, government officials, and military

forces, and threatened populations in the Far North Region. The attacks against civilians were indiscriminate and included killings and kidnappings of Muslims and Christians. The insurgents attacked places of worship. Reports suggest Boko Haram killed at least 400 civilians, police, military, and gendarmes as of the end of the year. On March 17, local media reported a military court sentenced 89 members of Boko Haram to death under the 2014 antiterror law for terrorist attacks committed in the Far North Region.

The quest for autonomy by some ecclesiastical districts often prevented the holding of worship services and, in at least one instance, led to the expulsion of members from a Christian community. Many individuals continued to associate Boko Haram with Islam and/or a specific ethnic group, which further increased stigmatization of some Muslims. Many prominent religious leaders, including imams and leaders of faith-based organizations, spoke out against actions of Boko Haram, especially its attacks against security forces and civilians. These leaders also highlighted Boko Haram's efforts to elicit support from local Muslim and Christian populations.

U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom issues with government officials and advocated for greater transparency and efficiency in approving the registration of religious groups. Embassy officers met with leading figures from the principal religious groups to discuss challenges to religious freedom, such as the rise of religious stigmatization. In addition, the embassy preemptively discussed the dangers of inter- and intrareligious intolerance by conducting outreach programs among religious groups to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue through one-on-one meetings.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 24.4 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2005 census released in 2010, the most recent available, 69.2 percent of the population is Christian, 20.9 percent Muslim, 5.6 percent animist, 1.0 percent other religions, and 3.2 percent report no religious affiliation. Of Christians, approximately 38.4 percent are Roman Catholic, 26.3 percent Protestant, 4.5 percent other Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, and less than 1 percent Orthodox. There are growing numbers of Christian revivalist churches.

Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The two Anglophone regions are largely Protestant, and the five southern Francophone regions are mostly Catholic. The Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is predominantly Muslim and lives in the northern Francophone regions; the Bamoun ethnic group is also predominantly Muslim and lives in the West Region. Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of animist beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits harassment or discrimination on grounds of religion, and provides for freedom of religion and worship.

The law on freedom of association governs relations between the government and religious groups. The government must approve religious groups or institutions as a prerequisite for lawful operation. Although the law prescribes no specific penalties for operating without official recognition, the government may suspend the activities of unregistered groups. The government does not require indigenous religious groups to register, characterizing the practice of traditional religion as a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

To become an authorized entity, a religious group must legally qualify as a religious congregation, defined as "any group of natural

persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship” or “any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine.” The religious group must submit a request for authorization as a religious group, including the group’s charter describing planned activities, the names and functions of the group’s officials, and a declaration of commitment to comply with the law on freedom of association, to the relevant divisional (local level) office. The relevant office forwards the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD). MINATD reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. Authorization may then be granted by presidential decree. Official authorization confers no general tax benefits but allows religious groups to receive real estate as a tax-free gift for the conduct of their activities and to gather publicly and worship. It also permits missionaries to receive visas with longer validity. Unauthorized religious groups may gather publicly and worship under a policy of “administrative tolerance” as long as public security and peace are not disturbed.

MINATD may issue an order to suspend any religious group for “disturbing public order,” which is not defined in the law. The president may dissolve any previously authorized religious organization that “deviates from its initial focus.”

The Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education require private religious schools to comply with the same curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher-training standards as state-operated schools. Unlike public schools, private schools may offer religious education.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government often temporarily closed churches, including two chapels of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) in Abong-Mbang, East Region, in a stated attempt to solve protracted leadership crises within Christian groups. The government stated it used the measure as a means to preserve order and encourage a solution and reconciliation among those involved. PCC members stated they were frustrated with the government decision, but hoped the closures might lead to an enduring solution.

By year’s end, a Quranic instructor who was arrested after security forces raided a number of Quranic schools in Quirvidig, Far North Region, in December 2014, was acquitted and released, according to the human rights organization OS-Civiles Droits de l’Homme. The organization reported at least 13 others were in pretrial detention, while according to Amnesty International there were 43 adults still being held from the raid, excluding two who subsequently died. In the same raid, 84 children were detained at a children’s center for six months.

Modestine Yida Mbukwe, the plaintiff in an August 2015 case, abandoned her efforts to bring judicial action against a gendarme officer when the military tribunal did not convene a hearing. She said the gendarme insulted her because she was wearing an Islamic headscarf and tried to remove her veil by force.

The government took no action to adjudicate applications for legal status by a number of religious groups whose applications had been pending for years. The government has approved only one religious group in the last 17 years and none since 2010. According to MINATD, incomplete application submissions and lengthy background investigations contributed to delays. Although by law groups must register, the government continued to allow numerous unregistered small religious groups to operate freely under the government’s policy of “administrative tolerance.” While 47 religious groups were legally registered as of the end of the year, hundreds more operated without official government authorization according to religious leaders. One of these organizations, the Cameroon Bible Fellowship, has been seeking government recognition since 2002.

Unlike the previous year, authorities did not take measures to ban the wearing of full-face Islamic veil in their constituencies. While

the ban implemented in July 2015 in the Far North Region remained in force, the government did not enforce the ban and many Muslim women wore burqas in other regions without issue.

During the year the government ordered a survey of religious groups operating in the country. MINATD officials said the survey would help the government gain better insight into religious organizations by researching registration status, places and times of worship, structure, and general practices. Officials also said the survey would potentially lead to issuing new authorizations or withdrawing active ones. At the end of the year, the survey was ongoing. During the biannual conference of regional governors held in Yaounde in July, the minister of MINATD urged governors to speed up investigations related to the survey and submit their assessment reports.

The government continued to grant broad legal authority to traditional leaders to manage their districts. As part of this authority, traditional leaders continued to exercise control over local mosques, with the right to appoint or dismiss imams.

The state-sponsored television station and radio stations regularly broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and ceremonies on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers or the president often attended these ceremonies.

The government provided an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including those operated by religious denominations. The size of each subsidy was proportional to the size of the school.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

The Islamic State in West Africa Province, more commonly known as Boko Haram, designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government, continued committing acts of mass violence in its quest to impose its religious and political beliefs. Boko Haram perpetrated numerous attacks, including mass killings, often directly targeting civilians, but also against government officials and military forces. It also threatened populations in the Far North Region. The attacks against civilians were indiscriminate and included killings and kidnappings of Muslims and Christians. The insurgents attacked places of worship. While there are no accurate estimates of total numbers killed and kidnapped, reports suggest Boko Haram killed more than 400 civilians, police, military, and gendarmes as of the end of the year.

Boko Haram carried out many suicide bombings and deadly attacks during the year. On January 13, a suicide bomber killed 12 worshippers at a mosque in Kouyape. On January 18, a suicide bomber killed four worshippers at a mosque in Nguetchewe. On January 25, a quadruple suicide bomb attack killed 32 people at a market in Bodo. On February 10, two suicide bombers killed six people at a funeral in Nguetchewe. On May 20, Boko Haram killed at least nine persons and set 39 houses on fire in Indoua, near the border with Nigeria. On June 4, Boko Haram attacked Ali Touboun near Darack, around Lake Chad, killing 10 fishermen and injuring or abducting several others. On June 29, media sources reported a suicide bomber affiliated with Boko Haram killed at least 11 people in Djakana near the border with Nigeria. The victims were gathering near a mosque to break their fast during Ramadan. Minutes later, an attack at a video club killed at least four individuals. On September 21, Boko Haram launched a suicide attack in Djakana, Mayo Sava division, killing four civilians and wounding two others. On November 22, media sources reported suspected Boko Haram fighters launched three attacks in the northern part of the country. One of the attackers killed six individuals. No one was killed in the other two attacks.

Governor Midjiyawa Bakari of the Far North Region reported that members of a local self-defense group spotted a suspected Boko Haram fighter riding his bicycle towards the town of Mora where Christians were assembling for Christmas Mass on December 25. The defense group attempted to stop and search the man, but he detonated his explosives killing himself, a nearby civilian, and two members of the defense group. Local media also reported three other armed attacks on Christmas day in Fotokol,

Belgede, and Madam, which left several wounded.

The government worked in conjunction with the Nigerian government in a joint forces campaign to free citizens under the control of Boko Haram and arrest Boko Haram fighters. On February 26, the government reported the joint forces killed 92 Boko Haram members and freed 850 individuals from their stronghold. On March 17, local media reported a military court sentenced 89 members of Boko Haram to death under the 2014 antiterror law for terrorist attacks committed in the country's North Region. On April 5, Cameroon's commander of the joint forces against Boko Haram reported more than 300 Boko Haram members were arrested and at least 2,000 people were freed from their strongholds along the Cameroon, Nigeria, and Chad borders. On May 15, the government reported the joint forces arrested five Boko Haram leaders and freed 18 women and 28 children in the northern Madawaya forest. On December 16, the border between Cameroon and Nigeria reportedly reopened for the first time in three years, signifying a decrease in threat from Boko Haram attacks.

On July 14, Amnesty International released a report suggesting more than 1,000 of the people accused and arrested of supporting Boko Haram were dying from disease and malnutrition in detention under the Cameroonian government. The report suggested that many of the people were arrested "without reasonable suspicion that they had committed any crime" and brought to trial in "unfair trials" in military courts.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In several instances, disputes within religious communities over church personnel, church management, and the creation of new ecclesiastical districts and bylaws prevented the holding of worship or resulted in the temporary closure of churches. The churches most affected include the PCC parishes in Ebolowa, Abong-Mbang, and Ngaoundere, as well as the Anglican Church of Cameroon Archdiocese of Northwest and West regions.

Deputy Administrator of Northwest and West regions' Archdeaconry Board of the Anglican Church of Cameroon Reverend Nchinda stated in a letter dated February 5 that the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Cameroon, Dibo Thomas Babyngton Elango, infringed on Nchinda's group's right to freedom of worship. The accusation was in response to an ongoing dispute since 2013 in which Archdeacon Emmanuel Yuh sought to separate from the Anglican Diocese of Cameroon and form a separate diocese, stating that Elango gave preferential treatment to Nigerian clergy over the Cameroonian clergy who were fewer in number. As a result, Elango reportedly suspended Yuh for six months without pay, banned him from the premises, and named new pastors to run the archdeaconry.

On August 11 in Ebolowa, South Region, authorities temporarily closed the Elat PCC church following debates among three of its factions. In January the PCC General Assembly created three separate pastoral units out of the existing Ntem presbytery, the Ntem, Endam, and Mvangan-Jerusalem presbyteries. The three conflicting factions could not agree on the church's administration.

Similarly, on February 24, local authorities upheld the closure of the Nkol-Mvolan and Mbama chapels in Abong-Mbang, East Region, which have been closed since 2014. On May 3, Justin Mvondo, the senior divisional officer (SDO) for Vina in Adamawa Region, attempted to evict PCC Pastor Bouloumegue Boyomo from Ngaoundere as a result of an internal conflict regarding the creation of new pastoral units. The SDO and pastor belonged to opposing factions of the PCC. According to media sources, the SDO intended to use his prerogatives as SDO to have his own faction control the Philadelphie PCC parish in Ngaoundere. The governor of Adamawa and the delegate general for national security, with MINATD's approval, intervened to prevent Boyomo's expulsion. The MINATD minister declared that the SDO's decision was a threat to public order and stated the SDO would be held personally liable for the consequences of his actions against unity, peace, and freedom of worship.

Many prominent religious leaders and organizations spoke out against Boko Haram, its attacks against security forces, and its attempts

to elicit support from local populations. In May the Council of Imams and Religious Dignitaries of Cameroon (CIDIMUC), a civil society organization aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, met for its fourth annual conference and raised awareness about peace and security challenges and “responsible citizenship” of imams.

Christian and Muslim leaders reported they worked together to protect their communities from violence from Boko Haram. In addition, the media reported some Christians secured mosques during prayer sessions while Muslims reciprocated and guarded churches on Sundays, therefore minimizing a surprise terrorist attack by Boko Haram. This grassroots-led strategy of protecting one another’s place of worship was tested in certain villages of the Far North Region along the Nigerian border and was expected to be extended to the entire region, according to Governor Midjyawa Bakary.

Some Muslim leaders in the northern part of the country stated that Boko Haram was not about religion but about terrorism alone. Some also noted that the greatest issue was not of interreligious tensions, but intrareligious. Many individuals continued to associate Boko Haram with Islam and/or a specific ethnic group, which further increased stigmatization of some Muslims. The Muslim leaders stated that the more moderate versions of Islam (i.e., Tijaniyya) were being threatened by more fundamentalist versions (i.e., Wahhabism), which in some cases was exacerbated by generational gaps. Other Muslim leaders believed there was no such conflict within Islam.

In December during the Feast of Tabaski in Yaounde, some Christians joined Muslim groups to celebrate. According to media, community members commented that religious tolerance was a necessary strategy to combat Boko Haram. Furthermore, according to a Muslim leader, Christians and Muslims sang and paraded together in Fouban during Ramadan.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy regularly discussed religious freedom and the importance of interfaith dialogue with government officials including the first vice president of the senate who is also a *Lamido* (traditional Islamic leader); the minister delegate of external relations in charge of “relations with the Islamic World; and divisional level administrative officers. In exchanges with the government, embassy officers advocated for greater transparency and efficiency in approving the registration of religious groups. Embassy officers also raised the matter of protracted issues over church leadership and personnel within Christian groups.

On November 14, the Ambassador visited the northern part of the country where he met with Muslim traditional leaders and local government officials. Embassy officers also met with prominent leaders from Christian and Muslim communities, including the coordinator of CIDIMUC, a former president of World Conference of Religions for Peace, and the secretary general of the Islamic Union of Cameroon. In addition they met with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Garoua, the Archbishop Emeritus of Douala, the Garoua principal imam, Garoua Poupoure Imam, and the deputy administrator of Northwest and West regions’ archdeaconry board of the Anglican Church of Cameroon. The conversations included discussions on promoting religious tolerance and peacebuilding. The embassy underscored the commitment of the United States to interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the face of threats by Boko Haram.

The embassy sponsored a project to engage youth to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. The project helped raise the awareness of 500 youth leaders across the country about the importance of preventing radicalization in the name of religion. The messages delivered to youth leaders during the project included calls for religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue, and rejection of a religious struggle between Muslims and Christians.

The embassy funded two projects promoting religious tolerance. The first brought together more than 150 civil society and religious leaders with government and U.S. embassy representatives to address and promote intergenerational, interreligious, and multicultural dialogue. As part of the project, three participants traveled to Maroua, two weeks after the bomb blast in the market square, to interact

with the victims of the Boko Haram attack. The three participants held a workshop with 40 youth leaders from Maroua in which they shared their experiences with Boko Haram attacks and discussed strategies and best practices for how youth could fight radicalization.

The second project addressed issues of religious intolerance among youth and used drama, poetry, spoken word, and music to promote diversity and inclusion and build religiously tolerant communities. The project trained 100 peer leaders to train other youth using social media to spread peaceful messages on religious tolerance. The project sponsored the first national spoken word and poetry contest on religious tolerance, and participants contributed to the development and production of a radio drama series on religious tolerance.

Central African Republic

Executive Summary

The interim constitution, known as the Transitional National Charter, and the new constitution, which came into effect on March 30, provide for freedom of religion and equal protection under the law regardless of religion. They prohibit all forms of religious intolerance and “religious fundamentalism.” Government officials exercised limited control or influence in most of the country and police and the gendarmerie failed to stop or punish abuses committed by militias, including abductions, physical abuse, and gender based violence. The mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia forces and the predominantly Muslim ex-Seleka militia forces continued to occupy territories in the western and northern parts of the country, respectively. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) reported that clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka militias in September resulted in the death of six Christian civilians and the injury of one peacekeeper. The death of an ex-Seleka fighter in October sparked a large clash in a northern town. According to reports, ex-Seleka fighters attacked the northern, predominantly Christian town of Kaga Bandoro, including an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, a Catholic Church compound, and a school, which resulted in 30 people dead and more than 40 wounded. The Muslim community reported continued discrimination, including when requesting government services. According to one witness, Muslim truck drivers were systematically singled out at security checkpoints, harassed, and forced to pay money to police, gendarmerie, and the Central African Armed Forces (FACA).

During the year, outbreaks of violence between Muslim and Christian citizens and residents continued, involving members of competing armed groups, including the anti-Balaka and the ex-Seleka forces. There were several separate incidents reported of violence between individual Muslims and Christians, followed by subsequent retaliation attacks. According to MINUSCA, on June 11, an assailant robbed and stabbed a Muslim motorcycle taxi driver to death in Bangui. On October 20, assailants killed a Muslim man in Bangui, cut his remains into pieces, and deposited them at the Central Mosque. On November 17, three Muslim men were conveyed to the Kouango health center following an attack by a group of anti-Balaka militiamen in Bangao and Pende. In October an armed gang killed a high-ranking military officer in the Muslim enclave PK5, with further sectarian violence ensuing within the capital. The media continued to portray the Muslim community negatively. Bangui’s Lakouanga Mosque reopened after being destroyed twice in recent years.

On separate occasions, the Ambassador, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, an Assistant Secretary of State, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with government and religious leaders to discuss the impact of the ongoing conflict among religious groups, challenges faced by the Muslim community, and ways to promote the return of IDPs to their homes and to foster religious tolerance. In July the U.S. Ambassador joined President Faustin-Archange Touadera for a visit to Bangui’s Lakouanga Mosque for the Eid al-Fitr holiday. The Ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with Christian and Muslim religious leaders to discuss their relationship with the new government, reports of religious

discrimination, and the role of religious groups in reconciliation efforts.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2003 census, the population is 51 percent Protestant, 29 percent Roman Catholic, 10 percent Muslim, and 4.5 percent other religious groups, with 5.5 percent having no religious beliefs. The nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) Oxfam and Coef5 estimate the percentage of Muslims at up to 15 percent. Some Christians and Muslims incorporate aspects of indigenous beliefs into their religious practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The Transitional National Charter, adopted in 2013, and the constitution, adopted by referendum in December 2015 and which went into effect on March 30 when the newly elected president was inaugurated, both provide for freedom of religion under conditions set by law and equal protection under the law regardless of religion. They prohibit all forms of religious intolerance and “religious fundamentalism,” which is not defined in law. They specify an oath of office for the head of state made “before God” that includes a promise to fulfill the duties of the office without any consideration of religion or faith.

Religious groups, except for indigenous religious groups, are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior, Public Security, and Territorial Administration. To register, religious groups must prove they have a minimum of 1,000 members and their leaders have adequate religious education, as judged by the ministry.

The law permits the ministry to deny registration to any religious group it deems offensive to public morals or likely to disturb social peace, and to suspend the operation of registered religious groups if it finds their activities subversive. Registration is free and confers official recognition and certain benefits, such as customs duty exemptions for vehicles or equipment. There are no penalties prescribed for groups that fail to register.

The law does not prohibit religious instruction in public or private schools, but it is not part of the public school curriculum.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to media reports and religious and civil society leaders, civilian authorities did not maintain effective control over the security forces. Human rights organizations stated the government did not take steps to investigate and prosecute officials who committed violations, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government, which they stated was a longstanding problem and one that fostered a climate of impunity. In June the government removed the commander of the Central Office for the Repression of Banditry following accusations of extrajudicial killings, but did not investigate or punish suspected perpetrators of human rights abuses.

Muslims continued to report harassment outside of PK5, a Muslim enclave in Bangui, and exclusion from national decision making. Muslim leaders cited situations where Muslims were treated as outsiders or as a different class of citizens, especially when

requesting government services. Muslim leaders were reportedly harassed, beaten, and restricted from free movement in the country. According to a group of Muslim youth, after being identified as Muslim (by name or by appearance) by government officials, they were charged bribes and other fees exceeding those charged to Christians.

According to a truck driver in the PK5 neighborhood, when driving between Bangui and Bambari in September, Muslim drivers were systematically singled out at security checkpoints, harassed, and forced to pay money to police, gendarmerie, and FACA. The driver stated that officials seized and destroyed identity cards or other official documents of those who did not pay.

On June 24, the interior minister issued a statement that security services should not arrest citizens on the basis of their religion in response to an incident where members of the ex-Seleka in PK5 took six police officers hostage.

In February during his inaugural address, President Touadera pledged to be “the protector of the weak and the defender of the rights of all citizens, without exception.” Touadera appointed three Muslim ministers to his 23-member cabinet. Media sources reported his actions were intended to send a message of reconciliation which was reflected in the composition of the government. In previous years, the government received some criticism for not appointing more Muslims into senior government positions. In March a Muslim was elected president of the National Assembly.

Some government officials stated they intended to focus efforts on reconciliation among religious groups, although observers stated they made limited progress by year’s end. Following elections in March, President Touadera listed reconciliation among one of the highest priorities of the new administration and subsequently created the position of presidential advisor for national reconciliation. In his June 7 address to the National Assembly, Prime Minister Simplicie Sarandji announced the government would establish a Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission intended to reconcile differences across religious lines, among other objectives. The commission was not active at year’s end. The Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation announced plans to establish Local Peace and Reconciliation Committees throughout the country, in accordance with a recommendation adopted at the May 2015 Bangui Forum. The committees were officially launched by President Touadera on December 21 in Bangui.

On June 27, President Touadera hosted an iftar at the presidential palace, reportedly the first time that a Central African president has done so. The government declared July 5 a public holiday in observance of Eid al-Fitr and September 12 a public holiday in observance of Eid al-Adha. The two holidays were added to the official permanent calendar of national holidays. Unlike corresponding Christian holidays, however, both were unpaid.

On September 14, President Touadera visited the Catholic Church of Fatima in the third district of Bangui where he joined a large congregation for Mass on the occasion of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. At the end of the Mass, the president delivered a speech encouraging the faithful to engage in social cohesion and donated money to support the IDPs taking refuge at the church compound.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Armed groups, which generally operated freely in certain areas of the country, committed many of the actions affecting religious freedom. The government remained incapable of imposing its authority throughout the territory, preventing violations or ensuring the rule of law and the administration of justice, according to many observers.

Armed groups, such as the anti-Balaka (mostly Christian) and ex-Seleka (mostly Muslim), controlled significant swaths of territory throughout the country and acted as de facto governing institutions, according to media and UN reports.

Police and gendarmerie failed to stop or punish abuses committed by the ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka militias, including abductions, physical mistreatment, extortion, killings, and gender-based violence.

MINUSCA was deployed to multiple areas within the country in response to the rising violence between anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka elements in the second half of the year.

According to MINUSCA, clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka militias broke out on September 16 in Kaga Bandoro, which resulted in the death of six Christian civilians and the injury of one peacekeeper.

The death of an ex-Seleka fighter on October 11 was quickly followed by a large clash in the northern town of Kaga Bandoro. According to reports, ex-Seleka fighters attacked the predominantly Christian town, including an IDP camp, a Catholic Church compound, and a school, which resulted in 30 people dead – including 12 ex-Seleka fighters – and over 40 wounded. According to MINUSCA, a local peace committee secured commitments from anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka fighters to allow freedom of movement for the local population which it said helped reduce tensions.

On October 4, an armed gang killed Marcel Mobeka, a high-ranking FACA military officer, in PK5. After Mobeka was killed, anti-Balaka and FACA elements killed several Muslims. President Touadera and his security team promised to apprehend the men responsible for the retaliatory killings; however, the government took no known action. The individuals responsible for killing Mobeka remained under the protection of ex-Seleka. According to the government, the act further fueled the sectarian violence within the capital.

On June 19, ex-Seleka fighters took six police officers hostage in the PK5 neighborhood. Police reported at least two people were shot and killed in the chaos. The police officers were released on June 24. According to media reports, the kidnapping was a retaliatory action after police arrested 26 residents suspected of illegally bringing in arms. The following day, fighting erupted within PK5 between MINUSCA and ex-Seleka elements, leading to the closing of the neighborhood's sole police station. As of the end of the year, the police station had not reopened, which Muslim sources said contributed to greater insecurity within PK5.

On October 23, following the funeral of a Muslim who had been killed by anti-Balaka fighters in the village of Barya in Kouï, an unknown number of Muslim community members and fighters from the armed group Return, Reclamation, and Rehabilitation (3R) killed one Christian man in retaliation. The 3R, comprising hundreds of predominantly Muslim armed fighters, was formed to protect the ethnic Peulh minority from anti-Balaka militias and controlled territory along the border with Cameroon, according to an international human rights organization.

According to the July UN Report of the Independent Expert, between January and June there were 63 documented cases of violence against people accused of practicing witchcraft. The report stated that for the most part anti-Balaka forces located in the capital and in the western part of the country committed these acts. Women were the most frequently accused, except in Bangui where these accusations were levied mainly against children. The report stated that accusations of witchcraft were more often than not actually attempts by armed groups to extort money from the victims.

MINUSCA reported that on August 29, ex-Seleka elements assaulted a 62-year-old man for practicing witchcraft near the town of Bria. MINUSCA also reported that on November 7 two suspected anti-Balaka individuals in Bandjiti village killed a 55-year-old woman accused of witchcraft.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

While most observers stated violent conflict and instability in the country had other sources, religion continued to be used as a tool to divide the population. Many but not all members of the ex-Seleka and its factions were Muslim, having originated in neighboring

countries or in the remote Muslim north. Members of the anti-Balaka were mostly Christian and continued to control the western part of the country. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On June 11, an assailant robbed and stabbed to death a Muslim motorcycle taxi driver in Bangui. The killing was reportedly regarded as a direct attack on Muslims by many in the PK5 neighborhood. Two Christians were subsequently killed on June 12, in what observers described as a revenge killing in response to the incident the night before.

According to MINUSCA, on October 20, assailants killed a Muslim man in Bangui, cut his remains into pieces, and deposited them at the Central Mosque. In retaliation, assailants abducted a Christian man, although it was unclear whether he was safely returned to his family.

On October 23, MINUSCA reported a Muslim was severely beaten and presumed dead following a fight with a Christian and thrown into the Sangha River. He reportedly regained consciousness and was rescued by Muslims.

On November 17, individuals conveyed three Muslim men to the Kouango health center following an attack by a group of anti-Balaka militiamen in Bangao and Pende. The town was reportedly deserted the next morning and seven houses were burned.

On November 6, a government official and a Muslim community leader each confirmed that four men armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades interrupted a church service in Bangui's predominantly Muslim third district and threatened the worshippers. The men chased members of the congregation and caused some damage to church property. The individuals were arrested shortly after the incident by members of a self-defense group and later released.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bangui led an interfaith peace march on October 12 through the third district.

Hate speech and negative comments about or directed toward Muslims were still common in most media outlets. Private media outlets reportedly continued to be heavily influenced by their financiers, generally representing a Christian perspective, and led by Christian editors. There has been no Muslim-operated radio station or Muslim-oriented program on the national radio station since September 2015.

Muslims continued to report facing consistent social discrimination, including an inability to move freely and therefore feeling "marginalized" by a lack of access to schools, hospitals, and basic necessities, including services provided by the government, as well as those provided by private donors and organizations. One imam in PK5 raised concerns about discrimination due to religious beliefs and the difficulties in carrying out commercial activities. Muslims also expressed a general discomfort in wearing traditional dress outside of the PK5 enclave, stating it drew negative attention or comments from non-Muslims.

Muslims reported facing several challenges within their community, including identity, discrimination, and internal division over leadership. A conference focused on intra-Muslim dialogue in Vienna from February 25-26 to address concerns over leadership, the marginalization of Muslim women in social cohesion work, policies and practices of discrimination against Muslims, and the role of Islam in the country.

The Lakouanga Mosque in Bangui, destroyed for a second time during intercommunal violence in September 2015, reopened in April. A Muslim cemetery in Bangui closed in October due to ongoing tensions reopened on December 13.

The Muslim community in the third district and the Christian community of Bimbo signed a "nonaggression and community reconciliation pact" at a public ceremony on February 11. The pact guaranteed free access for Muslims to an important Muslim burial ground in Bimbo's Boeing neighborhood. Muslims had been unable to access the cemetery since September 2015 and were forced to bury their deceased at home. The pact was reported as a step forward for interfaith relations.

On December 11, Muslims and Christians attended a symbolic reconciliation ceremony at a Mass at Bangui stadium.

The Interreligious Platform, consisting of members from the Protestant, Catholic and Muslim faiths, continued to spread messages of peace and reconciliation throughout the country. In September the platform outlined its plan to expand the scope and geographical reach of its activities, including the establishment of health clinics, vocational education programs, and a radio station to promote peace and social cohesion. According to the Interreligious Platform, the newly elected government had a perceived lack of interest in engaging with it.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador raised religious freedom concerns and encouraged outreach to all religious communities in high-level meetings, including with President Touadera, the presidential advisor for national reconciliation, and the minister of social affairs and reconciliation.

The Ambassador and embassy officials engaged regularly with religious leaders, including the leaders of the Interreligious Platform, the Imam of the Central Mosque, and the Coordinating Committee for Central African Muslim Organizations on issues related to religious freedom and reconciliation, and discussed ways to broaden access and dialogue to elected officials.

In January the Ambassador met with members of a Muslim Youth Association and a Muslim student organization to discuss the concerns of young Muslims and ways to promote tolerance and social cohesion.

In May the Ambassador delivered remarks at the Central African Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership launching ceremony. In June the embassy organized a leadership training workshop on resolving identity-based conflicts. Participants included imams, youth leaders, women, and members of community-based organizations in PK5. The program came about after community members stated that the neighborhood suffered from a divisive identity crisis that interfered with reconciliation.

In February the Ambassador attended the burial of three Muslims who had been killed in a car accident. The event was the first burial at the Muslim cemetery in the Boeing community in predominantly Christian Bimbo following the signing of the “nonaggression and community reconciliation pact” between Christians in Bimbo and Muslims in the third district. Muslims had previously been unable to access the cemetery.

On July 6, the U.S. Ambassador joined President Touadera for a visit to Bangui’s Lakouanga Mosque for Eid al-Fitr. The president called the mosque, which was rebuilt after being destroyed during the intercommunal violence in September 2015, a “symbol of reconciliation.”

During a visit in March the U.S. Ambassador to the UN delivered remarks at a reception honoring the inauguration of President Touadera in which she paid tribute to the religious leadership in the country and its work to promote peace. She also traveled to the Boeing community in Bimbo to visit the site of the Muslim cemetery. While there, the UN Ambassador participated in a meeting with Christian and Muslim members of the community to hear their concerns and express U.S. commitment to peace and reconciliation.

During a visit in September and October, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with Muslim and Christian leaders, government officials, and residents of Christian and Muslim IDP camps to discuss progress on religious tolerance and reconciliation since the installation of the elected government. He also discussed continuing challenges faced by citizens, especially Muslims and IDPs.

In October a visiting Assistant Secretary of State met with senior government and UN officials, civil society, and religious leaders to discuss issues related to reconciliation and inclusivity, the protection of civilians and atrocity prevention, and community violence

reduction. He visited PK5 and met with residents to better understand the ongoing struggles faced by Muslims in Bangui under the new government; he also met with the Imam of the Central Mosque.

In April a visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, along with the U.S. Ambassador, visited Bangui's Central Mosque. He also met with Muslim leaders, officials from the newly installed government, and residents of Muslim and Christian IDP camps to discuss challenges facing the Muslim community, particularly in the PK5 district, and displaced persons.

In February the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic States, and an embassy official participated in the conference in Vienna focused on intra-Muslim dialogue and capacity building in the Central African Republic. In their remarks, both the Ambassador at Large and the Special Envoy reiterated the U.S. government remains a committed partner to faith communities in the country and encouraged religious solidarity, tolerance, and a peaceful resolution to ongoing conflict.

An officer from the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom visited Bangui in June to meet with religious leaders, Muslim and Christian youth, and civil society organizations working on mediation programs in Bangui. The embassy increased its outreach to Muslim youth and community members in its public events and program of exchanges to the United States.

On June 29, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an iftar, bringing together members of the Muslim community and non-Muslim government officials and representatives of international organizations. During the iftar, the Ambassador asked all participants to adhere to a sense of community and mutual understanding while also promoting peace and stability. There were 48 participants, including representatives from 20 Muslim organizations, the Interreligious Platform, the minister of reconciliation, the presidential advisor on reconciliation, and two of the cabinet's four Muslim ministers.

Chad

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. It provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits "denominational propaganda" that inhibits national unity. The government maintained its ban on the leading Salafist association but anecdotal evidence suggested enforcement of this ban proved difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. Senior government officials, including the president, promoted religious tolerance in their public statements.

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for security in places of worship. Religious leaders, including the secretary of the Chadian churches and evangelical mission for harmony, the vice president of the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference of Chad, and the High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) publicly stated they supported the president's statements advocating religious tolerance. In May a group that included foreign government officials and representatives from both the Sufi and Salafi communities met in N'Djamena to examine the state of relations between the two communities. The group concluded that intra-Muslim tensions were high and expressed concern about the absence of a Salafi representative in the HCIA.

The Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights visited the country in October to discuss strategies for combating violent extremism with the president and other government officials. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom, met regularly with religious leaders, and supported outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for religious leaders, including Muslim,

Catholic, Protestant, and Bahai representatives and government officials, during which participants discussed religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Second General Population Census (2009), approximately 58 percent of the population is Muslim, 18 percent Roman Catholic, 16 percent Protestant, and the remaining 8 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs. Most Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A small minority hold beliefs associated with Wahhabism or Salafism. The majority of Protestants are evangelical Christians. There are also small numbers of Bahais and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or indigenous religions; religious distribution is mixed in urban areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. The constitution provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. These rights may be regulated by law and may only be limited by law to ensure mutual respect for the rights of others and for the "imperative" of safeguarding public order and good morals. It prohibits "denominational propaganda" that infringes on national unity or the secular nature of the state.

Under the law, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Planning, Urban Development, and Housing. The associations must provide a list of all the founding members and their positions in the organization, the founders' resumes, copies of the founders' identification cards, minutes of the establishment meetings, a letter to the minister requesting registration, the principal source of the organization's revenue, the address of the organization, a copy of the rules and procedures, and the statutory documents of the organization. The Ministry of Public Security and Immigration conducts background checks on every founding member and establishes a six-month temporary but renewable authorization to operate, pending the final authorization and approval. Failure to register with the ministry may lead to the banning of a group, one month to a year in prison, and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$80 to \$804). Organizations that fail to register are not considered legal entities and may not open a bank account or enter into contracts. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

Burqas, defined in a ministerial notice as a burqa, or any other garment where one sees only the eyes, are forbidden in the entire national territory by ministerial decree.

The constitution states public education shall be secular. The government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits religious groups to operate private schools.

The government-created High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) oversees Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic-language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums. The Salafi community is not a party to the council. The Grand Imam of N'Djamena, who is selected by a committee of Muslim elders and approved by the government, is the de facto president of the HCIA and oversees the grand imams from each of the country's 23 regions. He has the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and control

activities of Islamic charities.

The constitution states military service is obligatory and prohibits invoking religious belief to “avoid an obligation dictated by the national interest.” The government does not enforce conscription, however.

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of Territorial Planning, Urban Development, and Housing oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating intercommunal conflict, reporting on religious practices, coordinating religious pilgrimages, and ensuring religious freedom.

According to regulations of the government board that oversees the distribution of oil revenues, Muslim and Christian leaders share a rotational position on the board.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government maintained its ban on the leading Salafist association but anecdotal evidence suggested that enforcement of this ban proved difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques.

On July 6, during a speech marking the Eid al-Fitr Muslim holiday at the end of Ramadan, Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Pakacke stated that religious leaders of different faiths, through their prayers and actions, were the cornerstone of the country’s peace. Religious leaders of various faiths, diplomats, and other officials all attended the speech. The prime minister called on religious leaders to intensify interreligious dialogue and to continue to raise awareness about what he termed the trap of religious extremism. The prime minister congratulated young people who helped secure places of worship by using their own funds to purchase metal detectors, participating in interfaith vigilance committees, monitoring perimeters, and sometimes searching individuals entering places of worship to ensure that people could worship safely. On several occasions, Muslims and Christians coordinated this security jointly.

President Idriss Deby Itno encouraged religious tolerance in public statements and urged religious leaders to promote peaceful relations among religious groups. During the celebration of Eid al-Adha in September, political and religious authorities called on all religious groups to coexist peacefully and promote national unity. The president remarked, “The interreligious dialogue which has already proved its worth must be maintained on a permanent and lasting basis.” During a December 14 meeting with members of the Episcopal Conference, The president reiterated his appreciation of the religious leaders’ efforts for peaceful cohabitation in the country. He encouraged them to continue building a foundation of peace among different religious groups.

On April 23, the Episcopal Conference of Chad (CET) dedicated a new headquarters building constructed with financial support from the government. The structure centralized the CET’s various organizations working in the service of education, health, justice, peace, and rural development. On October 15, the prime minister, accompanied by several cabinet members, represented the president at Catholic Archbishop Edmond Djitangar’s installation ceremony.

The government conducted a long running public education campaign in the national media to inform people of the burqa ban; however, during the year there were no known prosecutions for violating this ban.

The government generally did not fund construction or maintenance of places of worship. The government offered, however, to contribute partial funding towards the construction of the country’s first Catholic basilica, as well as restoration of the Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral in N’Djamena. Both construction projects remained incomplete at the end of the year.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In May a group that included foreign government officials and representatives of Sufi and Salafi Islamic traditions met in N'Djamena to examine the state of relations between the Sufi and Salafi communities. The group concluded that intra-Muslim tensions in the country were high, pointing to the absence of a Salafi representative in the HCIA as a particular concern.

Religious leaders, including the secretary of the Chadian Churches and Evangelical Mission for Harmony, the vice president of the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference of Chad, and the HCIA publicly stated they supported the president's statements advocating religious tolerance.

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for security in places of worship. In July during Eid al-Fitr, the imam of the Great Mosque of Am-Djarass stated, "Anyone who kills in the name of Islam is a disbeliever. Islam is far from these barbaric acts."

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, comprising representatives of evangelical Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, met three times during the year to promote religious tolerance and combat prejudice.

On July 6, during Ramadan, members of the HCIA discussed the country's socio-economic challenges, peaceful interreligious coexistence, and global terrorism. They pledged to support the government in the fight against religious extremism, and made speeches explaining the purpose of the burqa ban. The HCIA and Radio al-Quoran used positive messaging to strengthen communities and counter religious extremism.

In October local Roman Catholic bishops called for "a new Chad," committing the Church to supporting development, education, health care, and national reconciliation, with particular emphasis on Christian unity and interreligious dialogue. They denounced corruption and mismanagement of land resources, advocated for reform of international donor cooperation, and reminded government authorities and citizens about the value of education.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other's ceremonies and celebrations. For example, Christians regularly attended iftars celebrating Muslim holidays, and in October, several imams attended the installation of the new Catholic Archbishop of N'Djamena.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights visited the country in October to discuss strategies for combating violent religious extremism with the president and other government officials. She also met with staff at Radio al-Quoran and imams from the HCIA.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met with N'Djamena's grand imam and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom and tolerance and to discuss efforts to counter extremist messages. The Ambassador attended events of the Union of Quranic Schools, including the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The Ambassador hosted an iftar attended by more than 40 religious leaders, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Bahai representatives, and government officials. At the iftar, attendees discussed religious freedom and tolerance in the country. Embassy officials met regularly with imams in training sessions and workshops to promote tolerance and human rights.

The U.S. government provided funding to the nongovernmental organization Equal Access, which worked with religious leaders of all faiths to promote moderate messaging on community radio stations. For example, Equal Access created and promoted moderate

content for programming on Muslim radio stations.

Comoros

Executive Summary

The constitution specifies Islam is the state religion but proclaims equality of rights and obligations for all regardless of religious belief. A law establishes Sunni Islam under the Shafi'i doctrine as the "official religious reference." Proselytizing for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal, and the law provides for deportation of foreigners who do so. The performance of non-Sunni religious rituals in public places is prohibited on the basis of "affronting society's cohesion and endangering national unity." Gendarmerie officers arrested Shia clerics and temporarily detained them in Moroni and Mutsamudu after videos of an Ashura observance appeared on Facebook. In October gendarmes in Mutsamudu prevented Ahmadi Muslims from celebrating the inauguration of the first Ahmadi mosque in the country after the Minister of the Interior banned all non-Sunni religious practice among Muslims. According to Shia Muslim religious leaders, some Shia were arrested in their homes because, after their mosques were repeatedly demolished, the imam allocated a part of his home as a "mosque" which authorities deemed a "public space."

As in previous years, there were reports communities unofficially shunned from their activities individuals who were suspected of converting from Islam to Christianity. Societal abuse and discrimination against non-Muslim citizens persisted, particularly against Christians or those who were converts from Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners encountered little to no discrimination. All citizens faced pressure to practice elements of Islam, particularly during Ramadan.

Representatives from the U.S. embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar visited the country and engaged with government officials on issues of religious freedom including the minister of justice, the minister of interior, the commander of the tendarmerie, and the governors of Anjouan and Moheli. Embassy representatives also discussed religious freedom with religious and civil society leaders and others, including members of minority religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 795,000 (July 2016 estimate). The U.S. government estimates the population is 98 percent Sunni Muslim. Roman Catholics, Shia, Sufi, and Ahmadi Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants together make up less than 2 percent of the population. Non-Muslims are mainly foreign residents and are concentrated in the country's capital, Moroni, and the capital of Anjouan, Mutsamudu. Shia and Ahmadi Muslims mostly live in Anjouan.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states Islam is the state religion and citizens shall draw the state's governing principles and rules from Islamic tenets. It proclaims equality of rights and obligations for all individuals regardless of religion or belief. A law establishes the Sunni Shafi'i doctrine as the "official religious reference" and provides sanctions of five months to one year imprisonment and/or a fine of 100,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs (\$216 to \$1,081) for campaigns, propaganda, or religious practices or customs in public

places which could cause social unrest or undermine national cohesion.

Proselytizing for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal, and the law provides for deportation of foreigners who do so. The penal code states “whoever discloses, spreads, and teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs” (\$108 to \$1,081).

There is no official registration for religious groups. The law allows Sunni religious groups to establish places of worship, train clergy, and assemble for peaceful religious activities. It does not allow non-Sunni religious groups to assemble for peaceful religious activities in public places.

The proselytizing or performance of non-Sunni religious rituals in public places is prohibited on the basis of “affronting society’s cohesion and endangering national unity”. Without specifying religion, the penal code provides penalties for the profaning of any spaces designated for worship, interfering with the delivery of religious leaders in the performance of their duties, or in cases where the practice of sorcery, magic, or charlatanism interferes with public order.

By law the president nominates the grand mufti, the senior Muslim cleric who is part of the government and manages issues concerning religion and religious administration. The grand mufti heads an independent government institution called the Supreme National Institution in Charge of Religious Practices in the Union of the Comoros. The grand mufti counsels the government on matters concerning the practice of Islam and Islamic law. The grand mufti chairs and periodically consults with the Council of Ulema, a group of religious elders cited in the constitution, to assess whether citizens are respecting the principles of Islam.

The law provides that before the month of Ramadan, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Council of Ulema publish a ministerial decree providing instructions to the population for that month.

The government uses the Quran in public primary schools for Arabic reading instruction. There are more than 200 public schools with Quranic instruction. The tenets of Islam are sometimes taught in conjunction with Arabic in public and private schools at the middle school and high school levels.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government did not consistently enforce the law prohibiting proselytizing and did not prosecute any such cases during the year.

In October just before Ashura, the minister of the interior issued a ban on non-Sunni religious practices. Several Shia Muslims nonetheless observed Ashura in private residences. After a video of their activities appeared on Facebook, gendarmerie officers arrested Shia clerics and temporarily detained them in Moroni and Mutsamudu. A number of blogs and media articles criticized the intervention as illegal. A Sunni cleric in Anjouan stated the detention of the Shia clerics during Ashura was justified because they were considered to be practicing “in public.” Given the alleged razing of nine or 10 Shia mosques over the years, the imam allocated a part of his home as a “mosque” and invited his congregation to worship there. The Sunni cleric explained that local religious authorities understood “in private” to mean “with your immediate family only.” This case was never tried in court, however.

Gendarmes in Mutsamudu prevented Ahmadi Muslims from celebrating the inauguration of the first Ahmadi mosque in the country, which opened on October 21.

During the year the minister of interior banned alcohol consumption and daytime swimming during Ramadan, which the police

enforced.

The grand mufti regularly addressed the country on the radio, applying Islamic principles to social issues such as delinquency, alcohol abuse, marriage, divorce, and education.

Almost all children between the ages of three and six attended private, informal schools at least part-time to learn to read and recite the Quran. During the year, the government announced its plans to expand religious and Arabic teaching to all public schools to further reduce the demand for unlicensed and unregulated private classes and reduce the potential for abuse in private facilities.

The government funded an Islamic studies program, known as the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Science (Imam al-Shafi'i Faculty) within the country's only public university. The government stated it initiated this step in 2003 to ensure the availability of local educational opportunities and to respond to concerns that youth who studied abroad in countries with differing or no Islamic traditions could return home and attempt to influence what the government considered to be the moderate Sunni tradition on the islands. The government restricted study by its citizens in Iran and Pakistan.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, there were reports communities unofficially shunned from their activities individuals who were suspected of converting from Islam to Christianity. Societal abuse and discrimination against non-Muslim citizens persisted, particularly against Christians or those who were converts from Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners reported little to no discrimination. All citizens faced pressure to practice elements of Islam, particularly during Ramadan. Most societal pressure and discrimination occurred behind closed doors at the village level. The extent of de facto discrimination typically depended on the level of involvement of local Islamic teachers. Most non-Muslim citizens reportedly did not openly practice their faith for fear of societal rejection. Persons who raised their children with non-Muslim religious teachings faced societal discrimination. Societal pressure and intimidation continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to non-citizens.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

There is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the country. Representatives from the U.S. embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar visited the country and engaged with government officials on issues of religious freedom, including the minister of justice, the minister of interior, the commander of the gendarmerie, and the governors of Anjouan and Moheli. Embassy representatives met with the minister of education to discuss madrassas. Embassy officers also met with Muslim religious and civil society leaders and others on issues of religious freedom, including the NGO Service d'Ecoute.

Congo, Democratic Republic of the

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. Catholics reported violence and harassment toward clergy members in response to their political activism. Armed men dressed in Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) uniforms killed a Catholic priest who ran an activist website documenting ethnic abuse. Two Catholic priests were arrested in connection with a political protest and released several days later. One Protestant minister was arrested after running a civil society workshop on elections and held incommunicado and without charge by the National Intelligence

Services (ANR) for a month before being released. There were reports of security forces harassing Muslims for money or property in connection with the government's pursuit of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a largely Muslim rebel group. Religious organizations became more politically active in advance of upcoming elections, and some parishes and convents reported experiencing threats and intimidation from government security services. Because religious and political issues overlap, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being based solely on religious identity. Although the government has suspended granting registration permits since 2014, many religious groups operated without government authorization or interference.

During the year, members of the Lega ethnic group attacked Jehovah's Witnesses in several provinces for reportedly refusing to participate in traditional Kimbikiti healing practices and initiation rituals. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the group killed a 60-year-old Jehovah's Witness woman in October; raped two Jehovah's Witness women, beat several Jehovah's Witnesses, destroyed a Jehovah's Witness worship hall, and robbed and destroyed the homes of three Jehovah's Witness families in November; and assaulted a Jehovah's Witness man and kidnapped his son in July. On August 3, a court convicted and sentenced to life in prison Jedidia Mwangi for the 2015 killing of Jehovah's Witness Kingeleji Mukoso for allegedly refusing to consult a traditional healer. In South Kivu Province in October, the family of a Christian woman killed by a Muslim man in September along with other members of the local Christian community reportedly burned down two mosques.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with the government to discuss religious freedom issues, such as government relations with religious organizations. The embassy had similar discussions with religious leaders and human rights organizations and engaged with members of different religious organizations to promote interfaith peacebuilding efforts.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 81.3 million (July 2016 estimate). The last national census was performed in 1981, and many existing demographic statistics vary in estimates and reliability. The Pew Research Center estimates 95.8 percent of the population is Christian, 1.5 percent is Muslim, and 1.8 percent report no religious affiliation (2010 estimate). Of the Christian groups, 48.1 percent are Protestant, including evangelical Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (Kimbanguist), and 47.3 percent are Catholic. Other Christian groups include the Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Greek Orthodox Church. There are small communities of Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Bahais, and followers of indigenous religious beliefs. Muslim leaders estimate their community to be approximately 5 percent of the population, rather than the 1.5 percent reported by Pew.

A significant portion of the population combines traditional beliefs and practices with Christianity or other religious beliefs.

Most religious groups are found throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims mainly reside in the provinces of Maniema, North Kivu, and Kinshasa, and in the former provinces of Orientale, Kasai Occidental, and Bandundu.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion and the right to worship subject to "compliance with the law, public order, public morality, and the rights of others." It stipulates the right to religious freedom cannot be abrogated even when the government declares a state of emergency or siege.

The law regulates the establishment and operation of religious groups. According to the law, the government may legally recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. The government grants tax-exempt status to recognized religious groups. Nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, foreign and domestic, must register with the government to obtain official recognition by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. Religious groups must register only once for the group as a whole, but nonprofit organizations affiliated with a religious group must register separately. Upon submission, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ) issues a provisional approval and, within six months, a permanent approval or rejection. Unless the ministry specifically rejects the application, the group is considered approved and registered after six months even if the ministry has not issued a final determination. Applications coming from international headquarters of religious organizations must be approved by the presidency after submission through the MOJ. The law requires officially recognized religious groups to operate as nonprofits and respect the general public order. It also permits religious groups to establish places of worship and train clergy. The law prescribes penalties of up to two years' imprisonment and/or 200,000 Congolese francs (CDF) (\$165) for groups which are not properly registered but receive gifts and donations on behalf of a church or religious organization.

The constitution allows public schools to work with religious authorities to provide religious education to students in accordance with students' religious beliefs, provided the parents request it.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Because religious and political issues overlap, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

In March a dozen armed men wearing FARDC uniforms killed Rev. Vincent Machozi, a Catholic priest, at a gathering of tribal and religious leaders in North Kivu. Machozi was a member of the Augustinians of the Assumption religious order and operated a website documenting atrocities committed against ethnic Nande (Yira) people. In October armed assailants shot and killed another Catholic priest, Rev. Joseph Milimbi Nguli, in Lubumbashi. Milimbi had previously preached in favor of respect for presidential term limits and respect for the constitution. Authorities arrested three FARDC soldiers in connection with the killing, but there was no information on their status at year's end.

Authorities arrested several local imams in Beni territory along with dozens of ADF members following an August 13-14 ADF attack in Luhanga that killed approximately 50 people. Several imams were charged with involvement with the armed militia group. Separately, the government arrested and sentenced one imam to death, which was commuted to life in prison, in an expedited trial for recruiting youth to join "terrorist" groups.

Some religious organizations criticized the government's failure to hold constitutionally mandated elections during the year and there were reports of retaliatory political intimidation. Two Catholic priests were arrested during antigovernment protests on September 19-20, but were released several days later. The ANR arrested Protestant minister Remy Flame Manguamba on September 15 during a civil society workshop hosted by his church, and held him incommunicado and without charge until he was released on October 17.

Some representatives of the Catholic Church, which publicly urged the government to abide by constitutionally mandated electoral deadlines, stated they were subjected to verbal harassment and government interference based on their political advocacy.

In conjunction with government military operations in North Kivu against the ADF, there were reports that in the Beni and Goma areas the national police and army harassed members of the Muslim community, particularly those dressed in a way that identified

them as Muslim. According to reports, this usually involved demanding money or property such as cell phones. Leaders of the Muslim community reported they kept in frequent contact with the government to share information regarding the ADF.

The MOJ has not issued final registration permits for religious groups since 2014, reportedly due to an internal investigation into registration practices resulting in fraud. In the interim, however, groups have been presumed approved and have been permitted to organize, and unregistered domestic religious groups reported they operated unhindered. The MOJ estimated over 2,000 registration applications for both religious and nonreligious NGOs remained pending. Foreign religious groups reported they operated without restriction after receiving registration approval from the government.

Leaders of all major denominations reported their members practiced their faith without interference from the government or local authorities and fully participated in their communities without religious discrimination. Aside from tension over electoral issues, Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and Kimbanguist religious leaders stated they had a good relationship with the government, and the government continued to rely on religious organizations to provide public services such as education and healthcare throughout the country. According to the Ministry of Education, approximately 72 percent of primary school students and 65 percent of secondary school students attended government-funded schools administered by religious organizations.

Muslim community leaders said the government did not afford them some of the same privileges as larger religious groups. The government continued to deny Muslims the opportunity to organize chaplains to provide services for Muslims in the military, police force, and hospitals, despite a complaint filed the previous year with the president and his cabinet.

One of the civil society positions on the Independent National Electoral Commission continued to be reserved for a member of the clergy.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, members of their community were sometimes targeted by members of other groups, in particular some members of the Lega tribe, for refusing to participate in traditional Kimbilikiti rituals.

On October 2, Kibuya Matangi, a 60-year-old Jehovah's Witness woman, was stabbed to death by villagers in Bulungu, Kwilu Province, after refusing to consult a traditional healer. Matangi reported previously receiving death threats because of her refusal on religious grounds to participate in customary exorcism practices. Local authorities arrested four individuals, including family members, thought to have been complicit in the killing, but the two main suspects, including the chief of the local community, remained at large and the case was ongoing at year's end.

On August 3, a court convicted and sentenced to life in prison Jedidia Mwanga for the 2015 killing of a Jehovah's Witness, Kingeleji Mukoso, for allegedly refusing to consult a traditional healer. A second Jehovah's Witness was injured in the attack. The court also ordered Mwanga to pay reparations to the victim's family.

In late September a Muslim man killed a Christian woman in a financial dispute in Katale, South Kivu Province. According to a local Muslim leader, as retribution for the killing, the woman's family, along with other members of the local Christian community, burned down two local mosques in early October.

On November 8, local media reported members of the Lega ethnic group in Kindu, Maniema Province, had targeted village members, including Jehovah's Witnesses, who refused to participate in traditional Kimbilikiti initiation rituals. Kimbilikiti followers reportedly raped two women and beat several members of local Jehovah's Witness families. The group also destroyed a local Jehovah's Witness worship hall, assaulted two individuals, and robbed and destroyed the homes of three Jehovah's Witness families. On November 9, local police with reinforcements from the FARDC arrested 12 people in connection with the attacks. The governor and mayor both

later visited to assess damages.

On July 29, three men assaulted Bernard Nzela, a Jehovah's Witness in Makalanga, South Kivu Province, and kidnapped his son because they reportedly refused to participate in or support local Kimbilikiti initiation rituals. Nzela was temporarily hospitalized for his injuries.

Some religious leaders reported continued tensions between Christian and Muslim communities in the eastern part of the country linked to the government's ongoing fight against the ADF.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met regularly with the government to discuss issues of religious freedom, such as government attitudes and actions toward religious organizations. The Ambassador and embassy representatives regularly urged the government and other community and political leaders to refrain from violence and respect the rights of civil society, including religious groups, to assemble and express themselves freely.

The embassy also discussed these issues with religious leaders, particularly in the eastern part of the country, and human rights organizations and used social media to highlight religious freedom issues and promote tolerance. The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with Conference of Catholic Bishops leaders during their visit to Washington, D.C. in April to discuss the political advocacy of the Catholic Church.

To address the role of religious groups in promoting religious tolerance and general peacebuilding efforts, the embassy included members of different religious groups on professional exchange programs to the United States. For example, the head of the Muslim community in Goma was selected to attend a program focused on using interfaith dialogue to support peace efforts.

Congo, Republic of the

Executive Summary

The constitution states that the country is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, provides for freedom of religion, bans the use of religion for political ends, and stipulates impositions on freedom of conscience stemming from "religious fanaticism" shall be punishable by law. A government decree with the force of law also bans individuals from wearing full-face Islamic veils in public places. A government-led security operation launched on April 5 damaged or destroyed several structures in the southern Pool region, including a Protestant Pentecostal church.

There were reports of increased societal tensions stemming from the rapid growth of the Muslim community. There were no reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against the Muslim community, however.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom and tolerance during meetings held with officials at the Ministries of Justice, Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action, and Interior. Embassy officials met separately with Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim leaders to discuss the state of religious tolerance and cooperation.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 4.8 million (July 2016 estimate). A 2012 survey by the Ministry of Economy,

Planning, Territorial Management, and Integration estimates 55 percent of the native-born population is Protestant (of which approximately 33 percent belongs to evangelical churches), 32 percent Roman Catholic, and 2 percent Muslim. Another 9 percent belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (Kimbanguist), the Celestial Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). An estimated 2 percent of the population is atheist. A significant portion of the population combines traditional beliefs and practices with Christianity or other religious beliefs.

Many residents not included in government statistics are foreign workers from predominantly Muslim countries, primarily in West Africa. Over the past few years, there has been an influx of Muslim refugees, particularly from the Central African Republic (CAR). According to the UNHCR, 4,094 Muslim refugees from the CAR live in the country. The president of the High Islamic Council of the Congo (CSIC) estimated there are 800,000 Muslims, 15 percent of whom are citizens, which would put the resident Muslim population above 15 percent of the total population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is secular, provides for freedom of belief, prohibits religious discrimination, and makes forced impositions on conscience based on "religious fanaticism," such as forced conversion, punishable by law. The constitution bans the use of religion for political ends and political parties affiliated with a particular religious group.

A decree with the force of law bans individuals from wearing the full-face Islamic veil – including the *niqab* and the burqa – in public places. The decree also bans Muslims from foreign countries from spending the night in mosques. According to the government and the CSIC, both measures are designed to provide greater security against the threat of terrorist acts. The CSIC notifies the government when it knows of Muslims traveling out of country to participate in religious education or for activities sponsored by the CSIC.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with and be approved by the Ministry of Interior. Religious group applicants must present a certification of qualifications to operate a religious establishment; a title or lease to the property where the establishment is located; the exact address where the organization will be located; bylaws; and a document that clarifies the mission and objectives of the organization. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation of foreign group members.

Public schools do not teach religion, but private religious schools may do so. The constitution protects the right to establish private schools.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to local and international human rights organizations including Amnesty International and a joint UN-Congolese government report, a government-led security operation launched on April 5 damaged or destroyed several structures in the southern Pool region, including a Protestant Pentecostal church located on property of Frederic Bintsamou, also known as Pastor

Ntumi, in the village of Soumouna. Followers of Ntumi, a Protestant clergyman, reportedly believed he possessed mystical powers. He was the alleged commander of the “Ninja/Nsiloulou” rebel group that fought against the government during the 1997-2003 civil war. Many observers stated they believed Ntumi may actually have worked with or for the government. The government blamed Pastor Ntumi and former militiamen for raids on military, police, and local government offices in Brazzaville on April 4. On May 19, the Minister of Interior and Decentralization issued a decree banning the activities of Pastor Ntumi’s church due to what the government stated was the church’s alleged harboring of armed militias and a serious threat to public order.

The law banning foreign Muslims from spending the night in mosques rendered some refugees from the CAR and internally displaced persons without shelter.

The government granted Christians and Muslims access to public facilities for special religious events. For example, in August an evangelical church held a conference on the outdoor grounds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and inside the parliament building in Brazzaville.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to NGOs and religious leaders, the general population, including Muslims, broadly supported the ban on full-face Islamic veils.

There were reports that private citizens expressed concern about the potential for rising tensions because of the rapid growth of the Muslim population, especially in Pointe-Noire, the country’s second largest city and economic center. Muslim leaders stated, however, that they had not received any reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against the Muslim community.

The Ecumenical Council, representing the Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist Churches, met at least biweekly. The Revivalist Council, representing evangelical Protestant churches, and the Islamic Council each met at least twice during the year. One of the goals of these meetings was to promote mutual understanding and religious tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom and tolerance during meetings held with high ranking officials at the Ministries of Justice, Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action, and Interior. The Ambassador discussed religious tolerance and the importance of respect for human rights.

Embassy personnel also met with civil society and religious groups to promote religious tolerance. In April embassy officials met with leaders from the Kimbanguist Church and Salvation Army. In May embassy officials visited a healthcare clinic for Muslims to engage Muslim community leaders. The embassy sponsored an imam for an exchange visit to the United States centered on community engagement and countering extremism. In May, September, and October, embassy officials met separately with Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim leaders to discuss the state of religious tolerance and cooperation. In December embassy officials hosted a meeting with the Muslim Women’s Association of Brazzaville to discuss challenges faced by Muslim women.

Cote d'Ivoire

Executive Summary

The 2016 constitution continues to provide for freedom of religious belief and worship to all, consistent with law and order, and prohibits religious discrimination in employment. It emphasizes that religious tolerance is fundamental to the nation's unity, national reconciliation, and social cohesion. It forbids speech that encourages religious hatred. The government denied registration to some religious groups that it stated submitted forged documents as part of their application. As in previous years, the government organized and funded Hajj pilgrimages for Muslims and pilgrimages to France and Israel for Christians. The government continued to include Muslim and Catholic leaders in political reconciliation efforts. The central leadership body of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) included positions for Muslim and Christian religious leaders.

On March 13, a group of six attackers killed 22 people and injured 33 others in Grand Bassam. The terrorists allegedly shouted "Allahu Akbar." Several religious leaders condemned the attack and encouraged peaceful relations among all religious groups. The president and first lady attended an interfaith ceremony on the Day of Remembrance for those killed during the terrorist attack at which both a priest and an imam said prayers for the victims and an indigenous priest made an offering.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed the importance of religious tolerance with political figures in the government and the opposition. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met with religious leaders and groups throughout the year to discuss the role they could play in maintaining a climate of tolerance and religious freedom. The embassy organized an hour-long radio interview, which was broadcast nationwide, with a Muslim American who addressed values of religious tolerance and diversity. In April the embassy hosted a seminar on countering violent extremism that brought together religious leaders, security and government officials, civil society leaders, academics, and media. One of the panels emphasized the peaceful coexistence of religions in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 23.7 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the most recent census in 2014, 42 percent is Muslim, 34 percent Christian, and 4 percent adherents of indigenous religious beliefs. Many Christians and Muslims also practice some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Traditionally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity, although adherents of both religious groups live throughout the country.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Harrists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Southern Baptists, Copts, adherents of the Celestial Church of Christ, and members of the Assemblies of God. Muslim groups include Sunnis, Shia, and Ahmadis. Other religious groups include Buddhists, Bahais, Rastafarians, followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Bossonists, who follow traditions of the Akan ethnic group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The new constitution adopted during the year continued to stipulate a secular state that respects all beliefs and treats all individuals equally under the law, regardless of religion. It prohibits religious discrimination in public and private employment and provides for freedom of conscience and religious belief and worship consistent with the law, the rights of others, national security, and

public order. It prohibits “propaganda” that encourages religious hatred. It recognizes the right of political asylum in the country for individuals persecuted for religious reasons.

The Ministry of Interior’s Department of Faith-Based Organizations is charged with promoting dialogue among religious groups and between the government and religious groups, providing administrative support to groups trying to become established, monitoring religious activities, and managing state sponsored religious pilgrimages and registration of new religious groups.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the government. Groups must submit an application to the Department of Faith-Based Organizations. The application must include the group’s bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding, and general assembly minutes. The department investigates the organization to ensure the religious group has no members or purpose deemed politically subversive and that no members are deprived of their civic and political rights. There are no penalties prescribed for groups that do not register, but those that register benefit from government support. For example, the government provides free access to state-run television and radio for religious programming to registered religious groups that request it. Registered religious groups are not charged import taxes on devotional items such as religious books and religious items such as rosaries.

Religious education is not included in the public school curriculum, but is often included in private schools affiliated with a particular faith.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government refused to register some religious groups because of internal disputes involving applicant groups and the submission of forged documents as part of the applications, according to an official at the Department of Faith-Based Organizations. Specifically, he said the department received some minutes from religious groups’ founding general assemblies that appeared to be forged and did not accurately reflect the organizations from which they were allegedly sent.

The government continued to fund and to organize Hajj pilgrimages for Muslims and pilgrimages to Israel and France for Christians, as well as local pilgrimages for members of independent African Christian churches.

The government included prominent Muslim, Catholic, and other Christian religious leaders in political and social reconciliation efforts. A Catholic bishop and an imam held roles as vice presidents of the Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission and subsequently of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Victims Compensation. The Catholic Church and the Muslim community both had representatives as commissioners on the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI).

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On March 13, a group of six attackers killed 22 people and injured 33 others in Grand Bassam. The terrorists allegedly shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the attack; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attack. Several religious leaders responded to the issue. The High Council of Imams expressed its deep sorrow after the “horrifying” attack and denounced the “barbaric methods” of the extremists. Members of the Ahmadiyya Islamic Mission Community publicly denounced it as “an atrocious act” after news reports suggested that a leaflet distributed the day of the attack was linked to their community. The Catholic Church called for “peaceful coexistence” among citizens.

The National Forum of Religious Confessions held a peace conference a week after the attack, which included Muslim, Catholic,

Protestant, Buddhist, and Seventh-day Adventist religious leaders. A spokesman and member of the National Islamic Council stated at the conference that “no religion should lead somebody to kill his or her fellow beings.”

On the Day of Remembrance for those killed during the terrorist attack in Grand Bassam, held a week after the attack, the government hosted a public interfaith ceremony attended by the president and the first lady at which a priest and an imam said prayers for the victims and an indigenous priest made an offering.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives frequently discussed the importance of religious tolerance with political figures in the government and the opposition. In January the Ambassador hosted the Dr. Martin Luther King prayer breakfast that brought together government officials from the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Regional Integration and approximately 40 religious leaders to discuss the role of religious tolerance in promoting reconciliation and nonviolence. In May the Ambassador visited the Mayor of Grand Bassam to thank him for his assistance on the day of the attacks, lay down a wreath to the victims, and emphasize the need for religious tolerance.

The Ambassador and U.S. embassy representatives met with religious and civil society leaders to discuss religious freedom, tolerance, and reconciliation. In March the embassy hosted a remote video conference between a former U.S. diplomat and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and tolerance and the important role religious leaders play in preventing radicalization of young people. The embassy provided financial and technical assistance support to a civil society platform of election observers that included a multid denominational council of religious leaders to represent the religious community perspective in the political discourse. During the October constitutional referendum and the December legislative elections, the platform promoted responsible rhetoric and urged religious leaders to encourage peace.

Under an agreement between Voice of America (VOA) and Al-Bayane Radio, VOA’s French-language *Dialogue des Religions* (*Dialogue of Religions*) continued to reach millions of listeners across the country with its weekly broadcast on the Islamic radio station. *Dialogue des Religions* is an interactive program featuring a host and guests – often religious scholars or journalists – who discussed religious issues in the news and answered listeners’ questions on various facets of religion. The embassy launched a radio program called *Hello, America!* in partnership with the Al-Bayane Islamic radio station. The first edition of the program in October featured an interview with an American official who is Muslim and discussed the values of religious tolerance and diversity.

On April 14, the embassy hosted a seminar on countering violent extremism in the country, which brought together religious leaders, security and government officials, civil society leaders, academics, and media. One of the panels emphasized the peaceful coexistence of religions in the country.

Djibouti

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion, but mandates equality for all faiths. The government maintained its authority over all Islamic matters and institutions, including assets and personnel of all mosques. Implementation of the decree effecting state control of mosques, conversion of imams into civil service employees, and the transfer of mosque property and assets to the government continued. A presidential decree forbidding all outdoor gatherings from late December 2015 to mid-April delayed a planned religious gathering.

Norms and customs continued to discourage conversion from Islam. There was a report of abuse and intimidation against a convert to Christianity in the Markazi refugee camp. There were also reports of discrimination in employment and education against converts to Christianity.

U.S. embassy officials met with the secretary general of the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs to discuss issues of religious freedom, including the transfer and control of assets and personnel from individual mosques to the state. The government-run newspaper, *La Nation*, featured President Obama's Ramadan statement on the front page. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also shared President Obama's Ramadan and Eid al-Adha messages on the importance of religious freedom with government and civil society leaders, including at an embassy-hosted iftar and on the embassy's Facebook page.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 847,000 (July 2016 estimate), of which 94 percent is Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Jews, Bahais, and atheists constitute the remaining 6 percent. Non-Muslims are generally foreign-born citizens and expatriates, highly concentrated in Djibouti City.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Islam is the religion of the state, according to the constitution. The constitution mandates the government respect all faiths and guarantees equality before the law, regardless of one's religion. The law does not impose sanctions on those who do not observe Islamic teachings or who practice other religious beliefs. The constitution prohibits religiously based political parties.

The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs has authority over all Islamic matters and institutions, including mosques, religious events, and private Islamic schools. The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Education jointly oversee the school curricula and teacher certification of approximately 40 Islamic schools. The public school system is secular.

The president swears an Islamic religious oath.

Muslims may bring matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance either to family courts whose code includes elements of civil and Islamic law or to civil courts. Civil courts address the same matters for non-Muslims. In legal matters, citizens are officially considered Muslims if they do not specifically identify with another religious group.

The government requires all foreign and domestic non-Muslim religious groups to register by submitting an application to the Ministry of Interior, which conducts a lengthy background investigation of the group. Domestic and foreign Muslim religious groups must inform the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs of their existence and intent to operate and are neither subject to registration nor investigation by the Ministry of Interior. Muslim and non-Muslim foreign religious groups must also gain approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to operate in the country. Once approved, every foreign religious group signs a one-year agreement detailing the scope of its activities. Foreign religious groups must submit quarterly reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and renew their agreements every year. The quarterly report details the activities, origin of funding for activities, scope of work completed, and identifies beneficiaries. Non-Muslim religious groups may not operate in the interim while awaiting registration.

The government is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The government declared a reservation regarding proselytizing in open public spaces.

Government Practices

The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs continued its efforts to implement a 2014 decree executing a law on state control of mosques, which converted the status of imams to civil service employees under the ministry and transferred ownership of mosque properties and other assets to the government. Government officials stated the decree aimed to eliminate political activity from mosques, provide greater government oversight of mosque assets and activities, and counter foreign influence. The implementation process has been slow. Fewer than half of the mosques in the country had an imam who was considered a civil service employee. The High Islamic Council met with an association of civil service employee imams to provide training and to have discussions. The training and discussions covered topics on the management of facilities, operational needs, the volume of microphones, not using the mosque as a political platform, and the uniformity of sermons across all mosques.

At the beginning of the year President Ismail Omar Guelleh issued a decree forbidding outside gatherings from December 2015 to mid-April. The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs postponed a regional conference of Muslim religious leaders until after the April election.

The government continued to permit registered non-Islamic groups, including Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, to operate freely, according to Christian leaders. For several of these groups, the government subsidized the cost of utilities at church properties as it considered some church properties to be part of the national patrimony. Religious groups not independently registered with the government, such as Ethiopian Protestant and non-Sunni Muslim congregations, operated under the auspices of registered groups. Smaller groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahais, were not registered with the government, but operated privately without incident, according to Christian leaders.

The government legally recognized Islamic marriages conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and civil marriages conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior for non-Muslims and interfaith couples. The government also recognized non-Islamic religious marriages, when documentation from the religious organization performing the ceremony was provided.

The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs sponsored a program in which religious leaders visited public schools for one-hour sessions to answer students' questions about religion. These weekly sessions were not mandatory.

The government allowed non-Islamic religious groups to host events and proselytize on the groups' private property; in practice, groups refrained from proselytizing in public spaces, such as hotels or street corners due to restrictions by the government. The government permitted a limited number of Christian missionaries to sell religious books and pamphlets at a local book store.

The government issued visas to foreign Islamic and non-Islamic clergy and missionaries, but required they belong to registered religious groups before they could work in the country or operate nongovernmental organizations.

In response to the violent attack on an Orlando nightclub by a Muslim claiming allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), President Ismail Omar Guelleh sent messages of condolence condemning the attack and expressing his solidarity with the victims' families. The government-run newspaper, *La Nation*, published President Guelleh's message.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Societal norms and customs discouraged conversion from Islam, but conversions still occurred. There was a report from the Markazi refugee camp (a camp for Yemeni refugees) of abuse and intimidation of a convert to Christianity by fellow refugees and local authorities. Christian groups reported discrimination in employment and education against converts to Christianity who changed their names.

Some representatives of Christian denominations reported incidents of animosity by individuals, such as throwing stones at church property. Representatives of Christian denominations reached out to students and staff at neighboring schools in an effort to foster religious tolerance and understanding, leading to a decrease in stoning of church property, according to a Christian leader.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with the secretary general of the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs to discuss issues of religious freedom, including the transfer of mosques' assets and personnel to government control and outreach to refugee camps. The Ambassador shared President Obama's Ramadan message on the importance of religious freedom with government, religious, and civil society leaders, including at an embassy-hosted iftar. The Ambassador posted on the embassy's Facebook page an Eid al-Adha greeting in French, Arabic, Afar, and Somali, while wearing traditional Djiboutian clothing. Over 100,000 people viewed the video, and the government-run newspaper, *La Nation*, released an article about the post. *La Nation* featured President Obama's Ramadan statement on the front page.

Embassy officials met with Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss interfaith relations and issues of respect for religious freedom. For instance, during a meeting to discuss the safety and security concerns of converts to Christianity, a Christian leader expressed his willingness to assist the converts and provided housing and protection for a Yemeni refugee.

Equatorial Guinea

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits political parties based on religious affiliation. The law also states that the country has no national religion. By decree and practice, however, the government gives preference to the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea, the only religious groups not required to register their organization or activities with the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Penitentiary Institutions (MJRAPI). The government provides funds to the Catholic Church and its schools for educational programming. Catholic masses remained a normal part of official ceremonial functions. A decree requires all religious groups except the Catholic Church to seek authorization for religious activities outside the prescribed hours of 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. or outside of registered places of worship, and the law requires a permit for door-to-door proselytism. The authorities routinely granted permission for religious groups to proselytize and to hold activities outside of registered places of worship, but generally denied permission for religious activities not within the prescribed hours. Evangelical Christian groups continued to hold activities outside the prescribed period.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials, including the Director General of Religion in the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Penitentiary Institutions to discuss the ability of individuals to practice any religion free of discrimination. Embassy staff members also met with religious leaders to discuss the promotion of mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 759,000 (July 2016 estimate). A local 2015 census conducted in collaboration with the United Nations, however, puts the total population at 1.2 million. According to the most recent estimates, 88 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 5 percent is Protestant. Many Christians reportedly practice some aspects of traditional indigenous religions as well. Two percent of the population is Muslim (mainly Sunni). The remaining 5 percent adhere to animism, the Bahai Faith, and other beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits political parties based on religious affiliation. The law also states the country has no national religion. The law states individuals are free to change religions. Christians converting to Islam are permitted to add Muslim names to their Christian names on their official documents.

Regulations establish an official preference for the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea. Neither group is required to register. The state provides funding to the Roman Catholic Church for its schools, the only religious group to receive such funding for operating educational institutions.

Catholic and Reformed churches are not required to register with the MJRAPI. Some long-standing religious groups such as Muslims or Bahais hold permanent authorizations and are not required to renew their registrations with the MJRAPI. Newer groups and denominations may be required to renew their registration annually. To register, religious groups at the congregational level must submit a written application to the director general of religion in the MJRAPI. Those seeking to register must supply detailed information about the leadership (e.g., curriculum vitae) and members of the group; construction plans of the religious building; property ownership documents, accreditations, and religious mandate; and pay a fee of 100,000 Central African Francs (CFA) (\$161). The director general of religion adjudicates these applications and may order an inspection by the MJRAPI before processing.

The adjudication of the registration application rests solely with the director general of religion – the commission of representatives of several government agencies that is supposed to adjudicate the applications has been inactive for several years. Those seeking to register must supply information about the group such as a list of members, and the MJRAPI may conduct an inspection before processing an application. The government may fine or shut down unregistered groups. The law requires a permit for door-to-door proselytism.

A MJRAPI decree specifies that any religious activities taking place outside the hours of 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., or outside of registered places of worship, require prior authorization from the MJRAPI. The decree prohibits religious acts or preaching within private residences if those acts involve people who do not live there. Foreign religious representatives or authorities must obtain advance permission from the MJRAPI to participate in religious activities. The decree exempts the Catholic Church.

The government recognizes official documents issued by authorized religious groups, such as birth certificates and marriage certificates.

The constitution states individuals are free to study religion in schools and may not be forced to study a faith other than their own.

Catholic religious classes are part of the public school curriculum, but with a note from a leader of another religious group, such study may be replaced by non-Catholic religious study, or by a recess.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

While the government routinely granted religious groups permission for any activities outside of places of worship, except in private homes, it usually denied permits to hold activities outside of the prescribed hours of 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. All religious groups, including small Bahai and Jewish groups, were allowed to hold services as long as they finished before 9 p.m. and did not disturb the peace. Evangelical Christian groups continued to hold activities outside the prescribed period. The authorities routinely issued permits for proselytism. Religious leaders said door-to-door proselytism occurred without incident.

Foreign evangelical missionaries were required to obtain residency permits to remain in the country. Evangelical Christians reported the permits were prohibitively expensive, leading some missionaries to risk the consequences of not obtaining or renewing such permits. The local police reportedly enforced the requirement with threatened deportation and requested a small bribe as an alternative. There were no deportations reported. The residency permits were not required for Catholic missionaries.

Protestant groups, including the Reformed Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Baptists, and other evangelical Christians operated primary and secondary schools. These schools had to be registered with the government and fulfill standard curriculum requirements.

Catholic masses were a normal part of all major ceremonial functions, such as National Day on October 12 and the President's Birthday on June 5. Catholic leaders met publicly with government officials and were usually the only religious leaders to do so. Catholic and Reformed Church leaders were often seated in preferred locations at official functions. On May 28, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo opened the new Catholic Church of Our Lady of Bisila, which was totally financed by the government, on the mountain peak above Malabo.

The President of the Federation of Evangelical Churches stated that its annual Easter procession went smoothly and without any intervention from the police. In previous years, the national police initially tried to stop the procession, but the event was allowed to proceed after proof of government authorization.

Some non-Catholics who worked for the government continued to report that their supervisors strongly encouraged participation in religious activities related to their government positions, including attending Catholic masses. Government officials stated they were expected to attend the president's birthday Mass at the Catholic Church.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim leaders, as well as other religious leaders with large congregations, reported no incidents involving restriction of religious practice, and had not heard of any incidents against other groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with the director general of religion to discuss religious freedom and the ability of individuals to practice any religion free of discrimination. The embassy also met with the imam for Malabo, the Archbishop of Malabo, evangelical Christian

pastors, Protestant leaders, and a representative of the Bahai Faith, to acquire their insights as well as to discuss the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially for minority religious groups.

Eritrea

Executive Summary

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit religious discrimination and provide for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief as well as the freedom to practice any religion. The government recognizes four officially registered religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea. It appoints the heads of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and the Sunni Islamic community. Most places of worship other than those of the four registered religious groups remained closed, but most of those buildings were unharmed and protected, including the Bahai center and Jewish synagogue. The government continued to limit financing of religious organizations and only allowed contributions from local followers or from government-approved foreign sources. Jehovah's Witnesses, who were stripped of citizenship in 1994 due to their refusal to vote, were unable to obtain official identification documents as in previous years. The government did not recognize a right to conscientious objection to military service, continued to single out Jehovah's Witnesses for particularly harsh treatment such as arrest and detention, and denied them the opportunity to obtain a national identity card required for most forms of employment, government benefits, and travel.

The government's lack of transparency and intimidation of sources made it difficult to obtain accurate information on specific religious freedom cases. According to the international nongovernmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch, all religious groups were to varying degrees targeted by government restrictions. Amnesty International reported the government subjected members of unauthorized religious groups to arbitrary detention, torture, forced recanting as a condition of release, and other forms of ill-treatment. January marked the tenth year of Patriarch Abune Antonios's house arrest. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI) corroborated reports that more than 10 Orthodox priests were detained in April for protesting his continued detention and expressing concern about government plans to appoint a new patriarch following the death of Abune Dioskoros, who was appointed by the government following the detention of Patriarch Abune Antonio. According to international representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Saron Gebru, a 28-year-old woman, began serving a six-month sentence in April after "being convicted for attending the 2014 Memorial of Christ's death." She was released on October 5. Meraf Seyum Habtemariam, a 53-year-old female Jehovah's Witness, remained imprisoned after being arrested for taking part in a "religious activity" in October 2015. The COI reported in June 2015 that authorities prohibited religious gatherings; arrested, subjected to ill-treatment, beat, and coerced religious adherents to recant their faith; and "disappeared" many religious followers between 1991 and 2015. The COI's findings relied primarily on testimony from victims and witnesses, thematic discussions, and written submissions. The June 2016 report concluded, "There are reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have and still continue to deprive Eritrean "Pentes," (members of Protestant evangelical and Pentecostal religious groups) and some Muslims, of fundamental rights contrary to international law on religious grounds. Jehovah's Witnesses have been targeted since May 1991, and other nonauthorized religious denominations since no later than 2002." The COI also concluded, "Persecution on both religious and ethnic grounds has been an integral part of the Eritrean leadership's plan to maintain its authority in a manner contrary to international law. Thus, the Commission finds that Eritrean officials have committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, in a large-scale and routine manner since May 1991." The COI found "that, at a minimum, the persecution of members of nonauthorized religious denominations persists." The government continued to deny the COI access to the country.

Refugees outside the country reported that neighbors in the country sometimes turned in to local authorities members of unregistered

religious groups that met together in homes to worship.

U.S. embassy officials continued to raise religious freedom concerns with government officials, including the imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses and the lack of alternative service for conscientious objectors to mandatory national service that includes military training. Embassy officials also met with clergy, leaders, and other representatives of religious groups, both registered and unregistered. Embassy officials also discussed religious freedom on a regular basis with a wide range of interlocutors, including visiting international delegations, members of the diplomatic corps based in Asmara and in other countries in the region, and UN officials. Embassy officials used social media platforms and outreach programs to engage the public and highlight the U.S. commitment to religious freedom.

On October 31, the Secretary of State redesignated Eritrea as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. Restrictions on U.S. assistance resulting from the CPC designation remained in place.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.8 million (July 2016 estimate). The Eritrean government estimates the population at 3.5 million. There are no reliable figures on religious affiliation. Government, religious, and local UN sources estimate the population is approximately 48-50 percent Christian and 48-50 percent Sunni Muslim. The Christian population is predominantly Eritrean Orthodox. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christian denominations including the Greek Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals, total less than 5 percent of the Christians. Some estimates suggest approximately 2 percent of the population is animist, and there is a small Bahai community of approximately 300 members. There is a very small Jewish community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit religious discrimination and provide for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief and the freedom to practice any religion.

A longstanding proclamation requires religious groups to register with the government or cease activities. Members of religious groups that are unregistered or otherwise not in compliance with the law are subject to penalties under the provisional penal code. Such penalties may include fines and prison terms. The Office of Religious Affairs has authority to regulate religious activities and institutions, including approval of the applications of religious groups seeking official recognition. Each application must include a description of the religious group's history in the country, an explanation of the uniqueness or benefit the group offers compared with other religious groups, names and personal information of the group's leaders, detailed information on assets, a description of the group's conformity to local culture, and a declaration of all foreign sources of funding.

The government has registered and recognizes four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea. It also appoints the heads of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and the Sunni Islamic community.

Groups must renew their registration every year. In 2002, the minister of information issued a decree requiring all religious groups, except the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea

(affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation), to submit registration applications and cease religious activities and services until these applications were approved. Since 2002, the government has not approved the registration of additional religious groups; information on how many registrations are pending is not available.

Religious groups may print and distribute documents only with the authorization of the Office of Religious Affairs, which has only approved requests from the four officially registered religious groups. If a religious institution disseminates a publication or broadcast through the media without government approval, the author of the publication or director of the broadcast is subject to a fine of up to 10,000 nakfa (\$667) and/or two years' imprisonment.

Religious groups must obtain government approval to build facilities for worship.

The law does not address religious education in public school. Religious education is allowed in private schools.

By law all citizens between 18 and 50 must perform national service, with limited exceptions, including for health reasons such as physical disability or pregnancy. In 2012, the government instituted a compulsory citizen militia, requiring persons not already in the military, including many who were demobilized, elderly, or otherwise exempted from military service in the past, to carry firearms and attend militia training. Failure to participate in the militia or national service could result in detention. Militia duties mostly involve security-related activities, such as airport or neighborhood patrolling. Militia training primarily involves occasional marches and listening to patriotic lectures. The law does not provide for conscientious objector status for religious reasons, nor are there alternative activities for persons willing to perform national service but unwilling to engage in military or militia activities.

The law prohibits any involvement in politics by religious groups and prohibits religiously affiliated media outlets from commenting on political matters.

All citizens must obtain an exit visa prior to departure. The application requests the applicant's religious affiliation, but the law does not require that information.

The law limits foreign financing for religious groups. The only contributions legally allowed are from local followers, from the government, or from government-approved foreign sources.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Government lack of transparency and intimidation of sources made it difficult to obtain accurate information on specific religious freedom cases. According to the international NGO Human Rights Watch, all religious groups, to varying degrees, continued to be subject to government restrictions. Other observers noted that the government continued to impose restrictions on proselytizing, accepting funding from NGOs and international organizations, groups selecting their own religious leaders, gathering for worship, constructing places of worship, and teaching religious beliefs to others. Amnesty International stated that the government subjected members of unrecognized religious groups to arbitrary detention, torture, forced recanting as a condition of release, and other ill-treatment.

According to the June 2016 COI report, individuals stated that members of nonauthorized religious groups continued to suffer acute discrimination, detention, beatings, and coercion to renounce their religion. There was a reported incident where military police forced individuals to sign documentation stating their commitment to Eritrean Orthodox Church in 2014 and 2015. A witness who reported being detained several times, including from 2014 to November 2015 for practicing a nonauthorized religion and who fled the country this year, told the COI that "Protestants detained are only released after denouncing their faith and

promising to worship in the Eritrean Orthodox Church.” Authorities reportedly sometimes released detainees who promised to renounce adherence to an unregistered religious group.

The June 2016 COI report concluded that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have and still continue to deprive Eritrean ‘Pentes,’ and some Muslims, of fundamental rights contrary to international law on religious grounds. Muslims were targeted, in particular in the 1990’s, in 2007-2008, and after the Forto incident in 2013. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been targeted since May 1991, and other nonauthorized religious denominations since no later than 2002.” The COI also concluded, “Persecution on both religious and ethnic grounds has been an integral part of the Eritrean leadership’s plan to maintain its authority in a manner contrary to international law.” This caused the commission to conclude “that Eritrean officials have committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, in a large-scale and routine manner since May 1991.” The COI found “that, at a minimum, the persecution of members of nonauthorized religious denominations persists.” The government continued to deny the COI access to the country.

According to international representatives of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, on April 5, Saron Gebru, a 28-year-old female Jehovah’s Witness, began serving a six-month sentence after “being convicted for attending the 2014 Memorial of Christ’s death.” She was released on October 5. Jehovah’s Witnesses also reported on the case of Meraf Seyum Habtemariam, a 53-year-old female Jehovah’s Witness, who remained in jail after being arrested for taking part in a “religious activity” in October 2015.

Government secrecy and intimidation of sources made it impossible to determine the precise number of those imprisoned because of their religious beliefs. Releases and arrests often went unreported. Information from outside the capital was extremely limited. Independent observers noted that many people remained imprisoned with no charges.

International religious organizations reported that authorities interrogated detainees about their religious affiliation and asked them to identify members of unregistered religious groups.

January marked the tenth year of Patriarch Abune Antonios’s house arrest. Patriarch Antonios was appointed by the Orthodox Church leadership in Cairo and put under house arrest in 2006 for protesting government interference in Church affairs. Church leaders and several NGOs, including Christian Solidarity Worldwide, raised concerns about his poor health and called for his release. The COI was also able to corroborate reports that more than 10 Orthodox priests were detained in April 2016 for protesting his continued detention and expressing concern about government plans to appoint a new patriarch following the death of Abune Dioskoros, who was appointed by the government following the detention of Patriarch Abune Antonio.

The government continued to detain persons associated with unregistered religious groups without due process, occasionally for long periods of time, and sometimes on the grounds of threatening national security. According to World Watch Monitor, the majority of the pastors arrested after the government began to crack down on banned religious groups in 2002 remained imprisoned. None have been charged with a crime or brought before a court.

The government continued to single out Jehovah’s Witnesses for particularly harsh treatment because of their blanket refusal to bear arms. Jehovah’s Witnesses estimated that 54 of their members were in detention as of October, including three men imprisoned without charges for more than 20 years. Other NGO sources corroborated reports of such detentions.

The government continued to consider Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious prisoners as being held for their religious affiliation or for national security reasons. Prisoners held for national security reasons were not allowed visitors, and families often did not know where they were being held. Authorities generally permitted family members to visit prisoners detained for religious reasons only. Released prisoners who had been held for their religious beliefs reported harsh detention conditions, including solitary confinement, physical abuse, and inadequate food, water, and shelter.

The government continued to require students in their final year of secondary school to attend the Sawa National Training Center where military training occurs. Students who did not want to attend military training at Sawa, including some conscientious objectors, sometimes fled the country, according to many media sources. The COI found that religious practice was “severely restricted” in the military; authorities informed conscripts that they were prohibited from practicing their religion. One refugee reported to an NGO that Muslims were allowed to pray in the army, but Christians were banned from reading the Bible and from praying or talking with others. He said that possessing a Bible was seen as a sign that the person was a Pentecostal Christian.

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that members continued to be unable to obtain official identification documents. Jehovah’s Witnesses were collectively stripped of citizenship in 1994 after their refusal to participate in the country’s 1993 independence referendum. The government continued to withhold documents and entitlements such as passports, national identification cards (required for employment), exit visas, and ration cards. In October the government began requiring customers to present a national identification card in order to use the computers at private internet cafes.

Official attitudes toward members of unregistered religious groups worshipping in homes or rented facilities differed. Some local authorities tolerated the presence and activities of unregistered groups, while others attempted to prevent them from meeting. According to an NGO representative who spoke with refugees outside the country, members of some unregistered Christian groups continued to meet, worship, and evangelize despite the dangers. The refugee also reported that individuals known to be practicing Christians did not receive the water distributions when neighbors did, and that they did not receive special government coupons to purchase subsidized food as did others in their communities. Local authorities sometimes denied government coupons (which allowed shoppers to buy at a discounted price at certain stores) to Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of Pentecostal groups.

The leaders of the four recognized religious groups stated that their officially registered members did not face impediments to religious practice.

Most religious facilities not belonging to the four officially registered religious groups remained closed. The government continued to allow the practice of Sunni Islam only and banned all other practices of Islam. Religious structures used by unregistered Jewish and Greek Orthodox groups continued to exist in Asmara. The government protected the historic Jewish synagogue building. Other structures belonging to unregistered groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists and the Church of Christ, remained shuttered. The government allowed the Bahai center to remain open, and, according to reports, the members of the center had access to the building for at least some forms of meetings. The Greek Orthodox church remained open, but there were no services. There were services held in the Anglican church building, but only under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. There were reports of other Protestant denominations holding services in homes, but not openly.

Some church leaders stated the government’s restriction on foreign financing reduced church income and religious participation by preventing the churches from training clergy or building facilities. The government permitted the Catholic Church to receive financing from the Holy See. The government also allowed funding from the Papal Foundation in the amount of \$90,700 to “subsidize the cost of the elderly priests’ residence.” The government did not permit the Evangelical Lutheran Church to receive foreign funding.

Government control of all mass media restricted the ability of unregistered religious group members to bring attention to religious persecution, which observers indicated was caused by government officials. Restrictions on public assembly and freedom of speech severely limited the ability of unregistered religious groups to assemble and conduct their worship, according to members of these groups.

The sole political party, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), appointed both the Mufti of the Sunni Islamic community and the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, as well as some lower-level religious officials for both

communities. PFDJ-appointed lay administrators managed some operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, including disposition of donations and seminarian participation in national service.

The government continued to permit a limited number of Sunni Muslims, mainly the elderly and those not fit for military service, to take part in the Hajj, travel abroad for religious study, and host clerics from abroad. The government generally did not permit Muslim groups to receive funding from governments of nations where Islam was the dominant religion on grounds that such funding threatened to import foreign “fundamentalist” or “extremist” tendencies.

The government sometimes granted visas permitting Catholic dioceses to host visiting clergy from Rome or other foreign locations. Catholic clergy were permitted to travel abroad for religious purposes and training, although not in numbers Church officials considered adequate; they were discouraged from attending certain events while overseas. Students attending the Roman Catholic seminary as well as Catholic nuns did not perform national service and did not suffer repercussions from the government, according to Church officials. Some religious leaders stated, however, that national service requirements prevented adequate numbers of seminarians from completing theological training in Rome or other locations, because those who had not completed national service were not able to obtain passports or exit visas.

Some Eritrean Orthodox clergy operating outside the country said the government sought to control Eritrean Orthodox churches in foreign countries. Authorities reportedly pressured one such overseas Eritrean Orthodox church to send money to the government or risk preventing church members from visiting relatives in Eritrea and potential seizure of assets held by the church members in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Government control of all media, expression and public discourse has made it difficult to observe any potential societal actions impacting religious freedom. Foreign diplomats have reported that individuals in positions of power were often reluctant to share power with Muslim countrymen and were distrustful of Muslims outside of the country. Some Christian leaders, however, have reported that Muslim leaders and communities have been willing to work with them on community projects.

Refugees outside the country reported that neighbors in the country sometimes turned in to local authorities members of unregistered religious groups that met together in homes to worship.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met periodically with government officials to raise religious freedom concerns, including advocating for the release of Jehovah’s Witnesses and alternative service for conscientious objectors refusing to bearing arms for religious reasons. Embassy officers raised issues of religious freedom with a wide range of interlocutors, including visiting international delegations, Asmara- and regionally based diplomats accredited to Eritrea, and UN and other international organization representatives.

Embassy staff met with clergy, leaders, and other representatives of most religious groups, including unregistered ones. Embassy officials attended religious celebrations, weddings, and funeral ceremonies of the four registered faiths as invitees of the government or of religious leaders and on an ad hoc basis.

The embassy’s social media platforms regularly posted articles that focused on tolerance of religious diversity in the United States and the U.S. commitment to human rights. The embassy hosted well-attended public events such as the public screening of President Obama’s talk at the Islamic Society of Baltimore and a Muhammad Ali film festival tribute that allowed embassy staff to engage

members of the public on issues of religious freedom and religious tolerance in the United States.

Since 2004, Eritrea has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On October 31, 2016, the Secretary of State redesignated Eritrea as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. Restrictions on U.S. assistance resulting from the CPC designation remained in place.

Ethiopia

Executive Summary

The constitution requires the separation of state and religion, establishes freedom of religious choice and practice, prohibits religious discrimination, and stipulates the government shall not interfere in the practice of any religion. On October 2, dozens or more were reportedly killed at a religious and cultural festival in Bishoftu. The government’s handling of the highly charged event reportedly resulted in a stampede. The government used the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) and other measures to restrict organized opposition and anti-government protests, including through the detention and prosecution of Muslims engaged in protests against what the protestors said was continued government interference in religious affairs. On October 9 the government declared a six-month state of emergency. Under a state of emergency, the government limits constitutionally granted freedoms including religious freedom; individuals are prohibited from inducing fear or inflicting conflict during sermons in religious institutions. On December 21, the Federal High Court found 20 supporters of the Muslim Arbitration Committee guilty on charges of participating in a terrorist organization, a crime under the ATP, and for committing or conspiring to commit crimes.

Protestors in the West Arsi area of Oromia region burned down 15 churches and related facilities belonging to Kale Hiwot, Full Gospel, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Orthodox churches in attacks carried out in February and confirmed by the independent Ethiopian organization Human Rights Council.

The U.S. Ambassador, Charge d’ Affaires, and embassy officials continued to discuss religious freedom with the government and engage with religious groups and faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to promote religious freedom and discuss their role in society. Embassy officials met with members of the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs (MFPDA) on religious tolerance, peace, and security. They also met with the president of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), the head of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia, the chairperson of the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE), and the head of external relations for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). Embassy officials attended some of the trials of Muslims and met with members of the Muslim community to discuss their allegations of government interference in religious affairs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 102.3 million (2016 estimate). The most recent census of 2007 estimated 44 percent of the population adheres to the EOC, 34 percent is Sunni Muslim, and 19 percent belongs to Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups. The EOC is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara and present in Oromia. Islam is most prevalent in the Afar, Oromia, and Somali regions. Established Protestant churches are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region, Gambella, and parts of Oromia. There are small numbers of Eastern Rite and Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, and followers of indigenous

religions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution requires the separation of state and religion, establishes freedom of religious choice and practice, prohibits religious discrimination, and stipulates the government shall not interfere in the practice of any religion. It permits limitations on religious freedom as prescribed by law in order to protect public safety, education, and morals, and to guarantee the independence of government from religion. The law criminalizes religious “defamation” and incitement of one religious group against another. The law permits sharia courts to adjudicate personal status cases, provided both parties are Muslim and consent to the court’s jurisdiction.

Under the state of emergency, which went into effect on October 8, the government limits constitutionally granted freedoms, including religious freedom, for a period of six months that may be renewed. Individuals are prohibited from inducing fear or inflicting conflict during sermons in religious institutions.

Registration and licensing of religious groups are the mandate of the MFPDA. The MFPDA requires unregistered religious groups to submit a founding document, the national ID cards of its founders, and the permanent address of the religious institution and planned regional branches. The registration process also includes an application letter, information on the board members, meeting minutes, information on the founders, its financial reports, offices, name, and symbol. Religious group applicants must have at least 50 individuals for registration as a church and 15 for a ministry or association to be considered. During the registration process, the government publishes the religious group’s name and logo in a local newspaper and, if there are no objections, registration is granted.

All religious institutions, including the EIASC, are registered by the MFPDA. The EOC, however, is registered in a provision under the civil code passed during the imperial era, which is still in force.

All groups must register with the Directorate of Faith and Religious Affairs at the MFPDA to gain legal standing. Most religious groups are registered by the MFPDA. Religious groups must renew their registration at least every five years; failure to do so could result in a fine.

Registered religious organizations are required to provide annual activity and financial reports. Activity reports must describe evangelical activities and list new members, new pastors ordained, and new buildings opened or built. The Charities and Societies Proclamation prohibits certain charities, societies, and associations, including those associated with faith-based organizations that engage in rights-based advocacy, and prevents civil society organizations from receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from foreign sources. Rights-based advocacy includes activities promoting human and democratic rights or equality of nations, nationalities, peoples, genders, and religions; protecting the rights of children or persons with disabilities; advancing conflict resolution or reconciliation; and enhancing the efficiency of the justice system or law enforcement services.

Religious groups undertaking development activities were required to register their development arms as charities with the Charities and Societies Agency and follow legal guidelines.

The constitution prohibits religious instruction in schools, whether public or private. The law permits religious instruction in churches and mosques, and schools may organize clubs based on shared religious values.

Under the constitution the government owns all land and therefore individuals, private businesses, and religious groups must apply to both the regional and local governments for land allocation, including for land to build places of worship, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries. The Charities and Societies Association and the Ministry of Health regulate religious schools and hospitals, which the government may close at any time for not following regulations.

The law prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion.

The government mandates a two-hour break on Fridays for Islamic prayers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights without reservations.

Government Practices

On October 2, at least 55 were killed at a religious and cultural festival in Bishoftu. The government's response to the highly charged environment reportedly led to the deadly stampede that resulted in most of the confirmed deaths. The initial cause of the disruption remained unclear, but according to media sources there were sounds of gunfire, teargas, and helicopters overhead. During protests that followed the incident and on social media, many individuals blamed the government for instigating the stampede and for incompetence in securing the gathering, among other accusations. On October 7, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted there was a need to investigate what occurred and urged the government allow independent observers access to Oromia and Amhara regions. On October 10, a group of UN human rights experts highlighted the October 2 events and urged the government to allow an international commission of inquiry to investigate the protests and any violence used against protesters since November 2015.

The government used the six-month state of emergency declared on October 9, the ATP, and other measures, to restrict organized opposition and antigovernment protests, including through the detention and prosecution of Muslims engaged in nonviolent protests. The state of emergency, in particular, restricted freedom of speech and media consumption while earlier restrictions prevented the use of social media. There were no new violent protests focused solely on Muslim grievances, but some Muslims participated in larger Oromo protests airing past Muslim grievances. Some Muslim community members stated the government co-opted religious leaders to impose Al-Ahbash, a Sufi religious movement rooted in Lebanon and different from indigenous Islam, on local Islamic religious practice. The government stated in 2015 that it no longer supported the program to impose Al-Ahbash on Islamic religious practice, although reports suggested Al-Ahbash teachings were still disseminated and Friday prayers generally conformed to Al-Ahbash teachings.

Muslim community sources stated there continued to be widespread sentiment in the community that the government exercised excessive influence over the EIASC. Some Muslim community members also reported government interference in religious affairs, including the government's refusal to allow elections in mosques because women would not be allowed to vote. Muslim groups continued to reject the 2012 EIASC elections for alleged government interference and the lack of new elections since then. There were mostly peaceful protests by Muslims against this perceived interference; however, the number of protests this year sharply declined compared to previous years and were incorporated into demonstrations addressing broader grievances, such as the rights of Oromo people. The state of emergency further discouraged such protests. Muslims in Jemo and Furi areas in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Chiro, Jimma, and Gondar protested during the celebration of Eid al-Adha on September 12. Protestors showed red cards, crossed their arms above the head and carried placards that read "We Need Freedom!," "Hear our Voices!," and "A Government that Refuses to take Criticism, Will not Last long!"

The government continued to take actions regarding the Muslim Arbitration Committee, a group identified with the 2012 protests.

In 2015, the Federal High Court found 18 members and supporters of the Muslim Arbitration Committee guilty of terrorism under the ATP and sentenced the individuals to imprisonment ranging from seven to 22 years. Later that year, the government pardoned and released five of those convicted. In early September the government pardoned two arbitration committee leaders (Abubeker Ahmed Mohamed and Kemal Shemsu Siraj), four members (Bedru Hussein, Sheik Seid Ali, Sheik Mekete Muhe, and Mubarek Adem) and three journalists (Yusuf Getachew, Murad Shekur Jemal, and Nuru Turki Nuru). On December 21, the Federal High Court found guilty 20 supporters of the Muslim Arbitration Committee. The defendants were convicted for “participation in a terrorist organization,” a crime under the ATP, and for committing or conspiring to commit crimes. The defendants found guilty included a leading Muslim scholar, Kedir Mohammed, and two radio journalists.

On January 19, the Federal High Court sentenced all 16 defendants in the 2013 Elias Kedir case to seven years in prison under the charge of participation in a terrorist organization, a crime punishable under the ATP. The defendants said they were protesting government interference in Muslim affairs and called for the release of the Muslim Arbitration Committee members through writings in various media and peaceful protests in mosques. Police arrested the defendants in 2013 in Addis Ababa and Wolkite town in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s (SNNPR) Region. On December 16, the Federal Supreme Court reduced the sentences of 12 of the defendants from seven years to three years and four months following the defense’s appeal of the High Court’s original sentences. Authorities also pardoned and released four other defendants in September.

The Federal High Court heard the case of 28 Muslim individuals, 11 of whom were tried in absentia, and found 24 of the defendants guilty of terrorism under the ATP. Some of the defendants told the court they had taken military and political training with Al-Shabaab and worked towards establishing an Islamic state in their country. The court acquitted four individuals of the charges in February. In March the court passed sentences ranging from four-year to 21-year prison terms.

The trial of 14 Muslims charged with the July 2013 killing of Sheikh Nuru in Dessie town continued into its third year. According to media sources, Sheikh Nuru was a follower of Al-Ahbash teachings and defended the government’s policy of imposing the new teachings. The government charged the individuals in November 2013 under the ATP law for “terrorist activity.” At year’s end, the prosecution and defense rested their cases and were awaiting a verdict. One of the 14 defendants reportedly died while in prison.

In November three teenage Christian girls and one young woman were sentenced to one month in prison after distributing a Christian book that allegedly sought to counter widely-circulated writings by a well-known Islamic critic. The four individuals were charged with inciting religious violence in October in Babile. Muslim communities in the area stated the book was an insult to Islam. Four teenagers attacked a local church shortly after the book was distributed; four suspects in the church burning were arrested in October.

The Directorate for Registration of Religious Groups within MFPDA reported it registered 1,600 religious groups and associations as of year’s end.

There were reports of discrimination in registration and land allocation. Members of some religious groups stated the exemption of the EOC and the EIASC from the registration requirement amounted to a double standard between the EOC and EISAC, on the one hand, and other religious groups on the other.

Protestants privately reported unequal treatment by local officials compared to the EOC and the EIASC with regard to religious registration and allocation of land for churches and cemeteries. The MFPDA, which had oversight responsibility for religious affairs, stated the perceived inequities were a result of poor governance at the local level and of zoning regulations governing a property’s existing and proposed communal use.

Some religious groups, mainly Protestant, continued to work through private and unofficial channels to seek the return of property

confiscated between 1977 and 1991. Although some property was returned in previous years, there were no reports the government returned any property during the year.

The MFPDA, working with the EIASC and other civil society groups, sponsored workshops and training of religious leaders, elders, and influential community members with the stated intention of addressing the potential for sectarian violence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Protestors in the predominantly Muslim West Arsi area of Oromia region reportedly burned down 15 churches and related facilities belonging to Kale Hiwot, Full Gospel, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, and Orthodox churches in attacks carried out in February and confirmed by the independent Human Rights Council. The attacks followed an incident several days earlier in which police stopped a bus en route to a wedding and then fired shots. The government stated that the attacks on the places of worship were carried out by “Islamist extremists” who received funding from foreign sources and opposition political groups. Some residents said the attacks were also linked to ethnic tensions and economic disparities. The government brought the suspects to trial at Oromia regional courts.

In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims reportedly generally respected each other’s religious observances and tolerated intermarriage and conversion. Some Orthodox Christians and Protestants continued to accuse each other of heresy and of actively working to convert adherents from one faith to the other; observers stated these mutual recriminations increased tensions between the groups.

The EIASC and the government continued to express concern about what they said was the increasing influence of foreign Salafist groups within the Muslim community. The EIASC stated it held these groups responsible for exacerbating tensions between Christians and Muslims and within the Muslim community.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials engaged with the MFPDA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on religious tolerance and peace and security.

U.S. embassy representatives observed some trials of Muslims accused of terrorism charges, including the trials of Elias Kedir et al., Kedir Mohammad et al., and Aman Assefa et al.

The Ambassador, embassy representatives, and visiting U.S. officials discussed religious freedom, the role of faith-based organizations, and tolerance with religious leaders, including the Office of the Patriarch of the EOC, the president of the EIASC, the cardinal heading the Catholic Church in Ethiopia, and leaders from Kale Hiwot Church. They discussed a range of issues, including the importance of religious freedom.

Embassy officials engaged with members of the IRCE to discuss religious tolerance and attacks on places of worship in the Oromia region and to emphasize religious freedom and tolerance. The embassy’s support of IRCE was designed to strengthen IRCE’s resolve to curb violence through increased dialogue among religious communities.

Gabon

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion and worship, and equality for all irrespective of religious belief. It grants religious groups autonomy and the right to provide religious instruction. The government denied some applications for registration during the year, often for reasons related to documentation. Ministry officials described the religious groups it rejected as often “one-man operations” practicing a mixture of Christianity and traditional animist beliefs. Whether registered or not, officials stated these groups were allowed to operate freely if they obeyed the law and did not harm their neighbors.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy staff met with senior government officials from the Ministry of Interior to encourage continued respect for religious freedom and asked government officials to continue their outreach to religious communities to discuss religious freedom. Embassy staff encouraged Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders to continue their interfaith dialogue and activities promoting interreligious tolerance and understanding.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.7 million (July 2016 estimate). Demographic studies do not track religious affiliation, and estimates from religious leaders and government agencies vary widely. The Episcopal Conference of Gabon estimates approximately 80 percent of the population is Christian. Of the Christian population, approximately two thirds is Roman Catholic and one third Protestant. The High Council of Islamic Affairs estimates approximately 10 percent is Muslim, including many noncitizen residents with origins in West Africa. The remaining 10 percent of the population practices animism exclusively or does not identify with any religious group. Many individuals practice a syncretic faith that combines elements of Christianity with traditional indigenous faiths, Voodoo, or animism. There is a very small Jewish community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the state as secular and establishes separation of religion and state. It prohibits religious discrimination and holds all citizens equal before the law regardless of religion. The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the free practice of religion, and the right to form religious communities that may govern and manage their affairs independently, “consistent with public order.” The constitution stipulates that religious communities whose activities are contrary to law or promote conflict among ethnic groups may be banned.

The law does not require religious groups to register, but those that do are eligible for exemptions from fees for land use and construction permits. To register, a group must present to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) copies of its founding statutes and internal rules, a letter attesting to publication of these documents in the applicable local administrative bulletin, a formal letter of request for registration addressed to the minister of interior, a property lease, the police records of the group’s leaders, and the group’s bank statements. Registered religious groups must also provide the MOI with proof of nonprofit status to receive exemptions from local taxes and customs duties on imports. The MOI maintains an official registry of religious groups.

The constitution states parents have the right to choose their children’s religious education. The state provides for public education based on “religious neutrality” but permits religious instruction in public schools if the parents request it. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. These schools must register with the Ministry of Education, which

ensures they meet the same standards as public schools.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The MOI reported it generally processed registration requests from religious groups within one month. The government denied some applications for registration during the year; the MOI estimated that it rejected over 30 such applications in the past two years. Ministry officials described the religious groups it rejected as often “one-man operations” practicing a mixture of Christianity and traditional animist beliefs. Their difficulty with registration usually concerned gathering the appropriate documents, according to ministry officials. Whether registered or not, ministry officials stated these groups were allowed to operate freely if they obeyed the law and did not harm their neighbors.

Muslim leaders reported the MOI did not request they discourage Muslim women from wearing the full-face veil in public as they had requested in previous years. Muslim leaders and the MOI reportedly remained cooperative and in agreement on this issue.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Interfaith dialogues among senior Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders concluded there were no significant societal pressures or actions against religious freedom. Leaders of all three faiths met regularly, attended each other’s major festivals and worked together to promote religious tolerance and to defend freedom of religion. The interfaith dialogues and activities included discussion on religious issues. Prior to the August presidential elections, leaders of all three major faiths made a joint appeal for domestic peace and interfaith dialogue.

A newly arrived rabbi stated he hoped to reach out to the Jewish community.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy staff met with senior government officials from the MOI to encourage continued respect for religious freedom, to discuss registration issues, and to ask government officials to continue their outreach to religious communities to discuss religious freedom.

Embassy staff encouraged Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders to continue their interfaith dialogue and activities promoting interreligious tolerance and understanding, such as regular meetings among religious leaders of different faiths.

Gambia, The

Executive Summary

The constitution provides every person the right to practice any religion, as long as doing so does not impinge on the rights of others or on the national interest. The constitution prohibits religious discrimination, the establishment of a state religion, and religiously-based political parties. On July 25, President Yahya Jammeh stated, “The Gambia will become a truly Islamic country, and the constitution shall be the Quran.” In December 2015 President Jammeh had declared the country to be an Islamic state, a measure

which opposition parties and others continued to oppose. Approximately 12 Christian youth were arrested in June following a statement by the inspector general on June 7 that music, drumming, and dancing would not be tolerated during Ramadan. The individuals were released 24 hours later. Three imams who were arrested without explanation by the National Intelligence Agency in October 2015 remained in detention at the end of the year despite a court order for the release of one of the imams – Alhagie Ousman Sawaneh. The Supreme Islamic Council (SIC), a government-sponsored religious council tasked with providing Islamic religious guidance but with no legal mandate to regulate religious groups, continued to ban the Ahmadi Muslim community from airing religious programs on the government-owned Gambia Radio and TV Station (GRTS), and on all public and private radio stations. On January 4, President Jammeh issued an executive decree requiring female government employees to wear headscarves to work, but the decree was revoked a week later after much attention and some criticism from international media and opposition parties.

There was some evidence of growing intolerance between the Tablighi and Sufi Muslim communities which sources said was due to a divergence of opinions on Islamic schools of thought. The Tablighi stated that they were frequently condemned by some Sufi Muslims and labeled as “extremists” or “fundamentalists” by the Sufis. Some Sufi Muslims refused to send their children to Islamic schools where teachers were known to be affiliated with Tablighi practices. Some Muslims who sought to convert to Christianity in connection with marriage reported hostility from Muslim neighbors and family members. The Interfaith Group for Dialogue and Peace, composed of representatives from the Muslim, Christian, and Bahai communities, met regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern, such as religious freedom and the need for peaceful coexistence.

The U.S. embassy discussed the need to maintain religious tolerance with ministers of government, regional governors, and members of the National Assembly. On June 24, the U.S. embassy hosted an iftar during which the Ambassador encouraged participants, representing Muslims, Christians, Eckankars, and Bahais, to maintain religious tolerance and to consider the critical importance of religious freedom to the development of peaceful communities. The Ambassador urged religious leaders and their congregations to continue their interfaith dialogue and to maintain the country’s tradition of religious tolerance. Embassy officials met representatives of the SIC, the Ahmadi Muslim Jama’at, individual regional Muslim mosques, and leaders of the Catholic, Bahai, and Methodist missions during a countrywide tour and discussed various religious issues, including the possible application of sharia on all residents of the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.0 million (July 2016 estimate). According to U.S. government estimates from 2013, over 95 percent of the population is Muslim, most of whom are Sunni. Other Muslim communities include Tablighi, Malikite, Qadiriya, and Sufism/Tijaniyah. There are also small numbers of Ahmadi and Ndigal Muslims.

The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south of the country, is 4.2 percent of the population (U.S. government 2013 estimate). Most Christians are Roman Catholic, but there are several Protestant groups including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and various evangelical denominations. Approximately 1 percent of the population practices indigenous animist religious beliefs, and many Muslims and Christians maintain some traditional spiritual practices as well. Other groups accounting for less than 1 percent of the population include Bahais, Hindus, who are mainly South Asian immigrants and business persons, and Eckankar members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states that “every person shall have the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice,” as long as doing so does not impinge on the rights of others or on the national interest. The constitution prohibits religious discrimination, the establishment of a state religion, and religiously-based political parties.

The constitution establishes *qadi* courts, with Muslim judges trained in the Islamic legal tradition. The *qadi* courts are located in each of the country’s seven regions and apply sharia. Their jurisdiction applies only to marriage, divorce, custody over children, and inheritance questions for Muslims. Sharia also applies to interfaith couples where there is one Muslim spouse. Non-*qadi* district tribunals, which deal with issues under customary and traditional law, apply sharia, if relevant, when presiding over cases involving Muslims. A five-member *qadi* panel has purview over appeals regarding decisions of the *qadi* courts and non-*qadi* district tribunals relating to sharia. Muslims also have access to civil courts. Non-Muslims are not subject to *qadi* courts.

There are no formal guidelines for registration of religious groups, but faith-based groups that operate as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must meet the same eligibility criteria as other NGOs. All NGOs are required to register with the NGO Affairs Agency according to the law, and must register as charities at the Attorney General’s chambers under the Companies Act. They are required to have governing boards of directors of at least seven members responsible for policy and major administrative decisions including internal control. The NGO decree requires all NGOs to submit to the NGO Affairs Agency a detailed annual work program and budget, a detailed annual report highlighting progress on activities undertaken during the year, work plans for the following year, and financial statements audited by NGO Affairs Agency-approved auditors. The government has stated the submissions help the NGO Affairs Agency monitor the activities of the respective NGOs.

The law requires all public and private schools throughout the country to include basic Muslim or Christian instruction in their curricula. Students may not opt out of these classes. The government provides religious education teachers to schools that cannot recruit such teachers.

The constitution bans political parties organized on a religious basis.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On June 12, authorities arrested approximately 12 Christian youths in Kuloro village in West Coast Region for singing and dancing during Ramadan, according to Christians living in the area. On June 7, the inspector general of police stated “all ceremonies, festivities, and programs that involve drumming, music, and dance during the day or at night [during Ramadan] are prohibited.” The youths were released after 24 hours in detention.

On March 21, the family of Imam Alhagie Ousman Sawaneh of Kanifing South Mosque sued the government requesting his release nearly six months after his arrest from his home in Kanifing. Sawaneh, along with two other imams, was arrested without explanation by the National Intelligence Agency in October 2015. Following two court proceedings, at which the state failed to appear, Justice Basiru Mahoney ordered the release of the imam in March. Sawaneh, however, was not released as of year’s end; the other two imams also remained in detention. Requests for an explanation from the SIC concerning the arrests went unanswered; the SIC stated it had no knowledge of the arrests or detentions. Advocates for the three individuals said that the constitution states that no accused should be held without charge in excess of 72 hours. Residents of Central River Region stated the imams were members of a new rice farmers association that was perceived by the government to be unsupportive of the ruling

party.

During a July 25 International Award for Quran Memorization Competition hosted by President Jammeh, he stated, “The Gambia will be a truly Islamic country, and the constitution shall be the Quran.” Leaders of Christian organizations said this declaration, following Jammeh’s December 11, 2015, presidential announcement declaring The Gambia an Islamic state, raised concerns that the president would apply sharia in all facets of society. Observers noted, however, that this would require the parliament to pass legislation to change the constitution.

On February 3, the SIC, a government-sponsored religious advisory body tasked with providing Islamic religious guidance but with no legal mandate to regulate religious groups, stated it was in charge of religious affairs in the country and that it contributed to the maintenance of peace and order by screening and certifying all Islamic scholars who wished to propagate the Islamic faith through local media to ensure that scholars preach in accordance with acceptable principles of Islam. In September 2015 the SIC had banned the Ahmadi Muslim community from airing religious programs on the government-owned GRTS and on all public and private radio stations. The Ahmadi community remained banned from the airwaves at the end of the year.

On January 4, the president issued an executive decree requiring female government employees to wear headscarves to work. According to media sources, the memorandum was delivered to all ministries and departments. The president’s decree received attention from international media and opposition parties. On January 13, GRTS announced the directive was lifted and female employees did not have to cover their hair.

Leaders of the Gambia Christian Council (GCC) said that while they remained concerned, they had not seen any actions suggesting an impending imposition of sharia and stated they were hopeful that no changes would occur. Local media reported the GCC sought clarity from the government that the declaration would not adversely affect the practice of their faith, but did not receive the desired reassurances. The GCC reportedly received a letter from the Office of the President on January 11 that indicated the government’s commitment to maintain peace and freedom of religious practice.

On February 9, the Knights of Saints Peter and Paul issued a press release on the president’s Islamic state declaration. The press release stated that an Islamic state would bring no benefit to Christians and doubted it would bring any to their “Muslim brothers and sisters.” It stated that the declaration was an unwelcome development that emphasized the differences between Gambians, rather than the things that bind them together, and concluded that it had the potential to “tear us grievously apart.” The Knights of Saints Peter and Paul is a society open to all Catholic men with a membership of 53 at year’s end.

The Bahai National Spiritual Assembly said the president’s statements had not affected its relations with the government and the council did not anticipate problems arising from the declaration.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Observers stated there was some evidence of growing intolerance between the Tablighi and Sufi communities due to a divergence of opinions on Islamic schools of thought. The Tablighi stated that they were frequently condemned by some Sufi Muslims and labeled as “extremists” or “fundamentalists” by the Sufis. Reportedly, Sufi Muslims sometimes used their mosques as platforms to attack Tablighi communities. Some Sufi Muslims refused to send their children to Islamic schools where teachers were known to be affiliated with Tablighi practices.

The Interfaith Group for Dialogue and Peace met less often than it had in previous years. The occasional meetings were held to discuss matters of mutual concern and encouraged tolerance, religious freedom, and peaceful coexistence among people of diverse faiths.

The Catholic Mission oversaw approximately 83 schools at various levels including nursery, lower basic, and upper basic. The mission said a majority of the students enrolled in its schools were from the Muslim community.

The Catholic Mission continued to express concern about the level of Christian representation in the government, noting there was only one Christian, Benjamin A. Roberts, the Minister of Tourism and Culture, in the 22-member cabinet.

In a prayer meeting on March 5, the GCC expressed satisfaction with the existing cordial relationship between Christians and Muslims, based on mutual understanding and respect for different religious persuasions.

Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians was common. As in previous years, there was anecdotal evidence from Christian minorities that Muslims converting to Christianity in connection with marriage sometimes experienced hostility from Muslim neighbors and family members.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed the need to maintain religious tolerance and the implications of President Jammeh's declaration of an Islamic state with ministers of government, regional governors, and members of the National Assembly. In response to requests for information from the SIC concerning the 2015 arrests and continuing detentions of three Muslim imams, the SIC stated it had no knowledge of the arrests or detentions.

On June 24, the embassy hosted an iftar during which the Ambassador encouraged participants, representing Muslims, Christians, Eckankars, and Bahais, to continue to practice religious tolerance and to consider the critical importance of religious freedom to the development of peaceful communities.

The Ambassador visited mosques and churches, and met with religious leaders from faith-based NGOs during a nationwide tour from September 6 to November 10. The Ambassador met with the SIC, Ahmadi Muslims, Bahais, and officials of the Catholic and Methodist Missions. Among other issues, the Ambassador sought their views on the president's Islamic state declaration and its likely impact on their communities. The Ambassador urged religious leaders and their congregations to continue their interfaith dialogue and to maintain the country's tradition of religious tolerance.

Ghana

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice their religion. Registration is required for religious groups to have legal status. Muslim leaders reported some publicly-funded Christian mission schools forced female Muslim students to remove their hijab and forced Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting these practices. There were reports some publicly-funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear the hijab. There were reports that administrators at some hospitals did not allow Muslim staff members to wear the hijab in spite of Ministry of Health guidance barring this practice.

Muslim and Christian leaders reported cordial relations among the country's main religious communities, facilitated through regular dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council. For example, in October the Presbyterian Interfaith Research and Resource Center sponsored a large interfaith gathering to discuss cooperation in promoting peaceful coexistence. In August at an Ahmadiyya gathering in the United Kingdom, the national chief imam praised Ahmadi Muslim

contributions to the country and stressed the importance of harmony among Muslim communities.

The U.S. embassy engaged with government officials to emphasize the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders and community organizations and sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. In August the Ambassador presented the embassy's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. award to National Chief Imam Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu in recognition of his commitment to promoting peace, mutual understanding, and harmony within Muslim communities and with other religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 26.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010 government census, approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent belongs to other religious groups or has no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Eden Revival Church International, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quaker), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Muslim communities include Sunni, Ahmadiyya, Tijaniyah and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and Shia.

Many individuals who identify as Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of indigenous beliefs. There are syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. Christians live throughout the country; the majority of Muslims resides in the northern regions and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa; and the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs resides in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice any religion and manifest such practice. These rights may be limited for stipulated reasons, which include "restrictions that are reasonably required in the interest of defense, public safety, public health or the running of essential services, on the movement or residence within Ghana of any person or persons generally, or any class of persons."

Religious groups must register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for other nongovernmental organizations. In order to register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee. Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

According to the law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit ecclesiastical, charitable, and

educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities.

The Ministry of Education includes compulsory religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. There is no provision to opt out of these courses, which incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity. There is also an Islamic education unit within the ministry responsible for coordinating all public education activities for Muslim communities. The Ministry of Education permits private religious and nonreligious schools; however, they must follow the prescribed curriculum set by the ministry. International schools are exempt from these requirements.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Muslim leaders reported some publicly-funded Christian mission schools forced female Muslim students to remove their hijabs and forced Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting these practices. Similarly, there were reports some publicly-funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear the hijab.

There were reports that administrators at some hospitals did not allow Muslim staff members to wear the hijab in spite of Ministry of Health guidance barring this practice. For example, a nurse in the Ashanti region reported her superiors threatened termination if she refused to remove her hijab.

Government officials leading meetings, receptions, and state funerals offered Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. The president and vice president continued to make public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslim and Christian leaders reported cordial relations among the country's religious communities, facilitated through regular dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council, an independent, statutory institution with religious reconciliation as part of its mandate. For example, in October the Presbyterian Interfaith Research and Resource Center sponsored a large interfaith gathering. Attendees included Minister of the Interior Prosper Bani, Christian Council General Secretary Reverend Dr. Kwabena Opuni Frimpong, and Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission of Ghana General Secretary Alhaji Ahmad Suleman Anderson. The participants discussed the roles religious actors could play in promoting peaceful elections and peaceful coexistence and civic engagement of religious communities. In August at an Ahmadiyya gathering in the United Kingdom, the national chief imam praised Ahmadiyya contributions to the country and stressed the importance of harmony among Muslim communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed with government officials the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy also discussed these subjects with a broad range of other actors, including Muslim civil society organizations and Christian groups.

In July the Ambassador hosted an iftar with National Chief Imam Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu and other religious leaders from various faiths. The event emphasized inclusion regardless of faith, gender, and ethnicity; religious tolerance; and freedom of

expression.

In August the Ambassador presented the embassy's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. award to National Chief Imam Sharubutu in recognition of his commitment to promoting peace, mutual understanding, and harmony within Muslim communities and with other religious groups. The award ceremony emphasized the importance of interfaith understanding and included participation from a wide range of religious leaders from various faiths.

In October the embassy sponsored a two-day capacity-building workshop in Accra for 100 young Muslim leaders aged 25-35 representing each region of the country. The workshop promoted interfaith cooperation among the younger generation.

Guinea

Executive Summary

The constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religion. The Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) issues weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. Although the SRA did not control sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. Following terrorist attacks in neighboring countries, authorities permanently closed a mosque considered to be too close to the runway of Conakry's international airport.

Following the end of the Ebola epidemic, Saudi Arabia resumed authorizing Guineans to make the annual Hajj pilgrimage for the first time since 2014.

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grands imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance and reconciliation among religious groups. The embassy hosted several iftars with Muslim and other religious leaders throughout the country, conveying each time the importance of religious freedom and harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 12.1 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent is Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the population incorporates some indigenous rituals into its religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni; however, Sufism is also present. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Bahai community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, large cities, the south, and the eastern Forest Region. Adherents of indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religious faith. It recognizes the right of religious institutions and groups to establish and manage themselves freely. It bars political parties that identify with a particular religious group. These rights are subject only to “those limits that are indispensable to maintain the public order and democracy.”

By law, the SRA must approve all religious groups. Groups must provide a written constitution and application to the SRA along with their address and a fee of 250,000 Guinean francs (GNF) (\$27). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes an officially recognized religion. Each registered religious group must present to the government a report on its affairs every six months. Registration entitles religious groups to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and to select energy subsidies.

Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. By law, the government may shut down unregistered groups and expel foreign group leaders. There is limited opportunity for legal appeal of these penalties.

Religious groups may not own radio or television stations.

The compulsory primary school curriculum does not include religious studies.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry and the principal mosques in the main cities of the four regions are government employees. These mosques are directly under the administration of the government. Other mosques and some Christian groups receive government subsidies for pilgrimages.

The SRA secretary general of religious affairs appoints six national directors to lead the Offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs and the Endowment, and Inspector General. The SRA is charged with promoting good relations among religious groups and coordinates with other members of the informal Interreligious Council, which is composed of Muslims and members from Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant churches as well as the SRA.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The SRA continued to issue mandatory weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. The stated purpose of the weekly guidance was to harmonize religious views in order to prevent radical or political connotations in sermons. Although the SRA did not monitor sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. Clerics whom the SRA judged to be noncompliant were subject to disciplinary action.

Opposition politicians continued to say some imams who supported them or their parties were replaced by the government, but offered no specific examples.

After two years of Ebola outbreaks, Saudi Arabia resumed allowing Guineans to participate in the Hajj. The SRA facilitated and organized the travel of approximately 6,000 applicants who each had to pay approximately 40 million GNF (\$4,340) toward the cost of travel. The government continued to subsidize the travel of Catholics on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy, providing 2 billion GNF (\$217,000) compared to 3 billion GNF (\$325,000) in 2015. The decrease in subsidy from the previous

year led the government to decide to rotate the benefits to a different Christian group each year, including Anglican, Catholics, and Adventists, for their pilgrimages to the holy sites. The decision to alternate benefits to Christian groups will be implemented beginning in 2017.

According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely but did not receive the tax and other benefits received by registered groups. The small Jehovah's Witness community reportedly proselytized from house to house without interference, although neither it nor the Bahai community requested official recognition. Some groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relationship with the SRA.

The congregation of a mosque closed in December 2015 by the government due to its proximity to Conakry international airport runway said that they accepted the closure but complained about the lack of communication from the government. Authorities said they closed the mosque in response to terrorist attacks in neighboring countries and said the closure was to prevent a "potential attack" against the airport. The mosque was not compensated for the closure.

Islamic schools were prevalent throughout the country and were the traditional forum for religious education. Some Islamic schools were wholly private, while others received local government support. Islamic schools, particularly common in the Fouta Djallon region, taught the compulsory government curriculum along with additional Quranic studies. Private Christian schools, which accepted students of all religious groups, existed in the nation's capital and most other large cities. They taught the compulsory curriculum but did not receive government support and held Christian prayers before school.

The government allocated free broadcast time on state-owned national television for Islamic and Christian programming, including Islamic religious instruction, Friday prayers from the central mosque, and church services. Muslim broadcasts received more air time, while different Christian groups received broadcast time on Sundays on a rotating basis. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In some parts of the country such as the middle and the upper regions, strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam.

Members of the Bahai Faith reported being discriminated against, and banned from their families because of their religious beliefs. The wife of the secretary of the spiritual assembly of Conakry reported she received pressure from her family who did not accept her union with her husband, a member of the Bahai Faith.

In February unidentified individuals burned a mosque built and led by the president of the Islamic organization *Nourdine Islam*, a well-known scholar from Kankan. The incident was followed by clashes between groups supportive of the scholar and the suspected perpetrators. The investigation did not conclude why the incident occurred; the scholar stated that it was triggered by family rivalries and jealousy over his fame.

The Office of Christian Affairs reported that the father of two Muslim women accused a pastor of kidnapping his daughters, aged 27 and 29. The women converted to Christianity and started to attend the pastor's church in the suburbs of Conakry. The pastor was interviewed by the police in February but was not detained or charged. According to sources the women were threatened with death by their father for their conversion.

The SRA did not resolve disputes among the Karambaya and Touraya Muslim communities in Touba. No trial took place following 2015 clashes between the two Muslim groups that resulted in five deaths. The two groups quarreled about the building of a new mosque.

The Kalima Catholic Mission did not begin construction on a church despite authorization by the government in 2015. The Muslim community reportedly lobbied against and stopped the project from proceeding the previous year. Religious authorities of both sides continued to work on resolving this issue. The chief of the mission reported local authorities of the region were influenced by Muslims to stop issuing necessary permits in this case.

Many Muslim students not enrolled in private Islamic schools received religious education at madrassahs, some of which were associated with mosques and others supported by local communities. Unlike the Islamic schools, the madrassahs did not teach the compulsory primary school curriculum. Although the government did not recognize the madrassahs or require them to register, it allowed them to operate freely. They focused on Quranic studies and instruction was in Arabic rather than French. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states supported some madrassahs. Most students in madrassahs also attended public or private schools teaching the compulsory curriculum, which did not include religious studies.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of the religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grands imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance.

U.S. embassy personnel worked closely with the SRA and religious leaders, including the grand imams of Conakry, Kankan, and Labe; Catholic and Anglican bishops; and Islamic and Christian clergy. Embassy officers advocated for religious tolerance.

U.S. embassy personnel participated in several iftar celebrations nationwide to promote good relations and mutual understanding among religious groups and as an opportunity to relay a message of respect for religious freedom and reconciliation among religious groups.

Guinea-Bissau

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes separation of religion and state and the responsibility of the state to respect and protect legally recognized religious groups. There were no reports of significant government action affecting religious freedom.

Some Muslim community members reported concerns about foreign imams teaching what they termed radical Islamic practices to the local Muslim population.

There is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the country. U.S. embassy personnel from Dakar met with high-level government officials as well as leaders of various religious communities to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.8 million (July 2016 estimate). Estimates of the religious composition of the population vary widely, but according to a 2010 study by the Pew Research Center, approximately 45 percent is Muslim, 31 percent follows indigenous religious practices, and 22 percent is Christian. There are small communities of Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews, many of whom are foreign nationals.

The Fula (Peuhl or Fulani) and Mandinka (Malinke) ethnic groups are the most numerous followers of Islam. Muslims generally live

in the north and northeast, and most Muslims are Sunni. Adherents of indigenous religious beliefs generally live in all but the northern parts of the country. The Christian population, including Roman Catholics and Protestants, are primarily from the Pepel, Manjaco, and Balanta ethnic groups and are concentrated in Bissau and along the coast. Large numbers of Muslims and Christians hold indigenous beliefs as well.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution stipulates the state shall be separate from religious institutions and shall respect and protect legally recognized religious groups, whose activities shall be subject to the law. It holds freedom of conscience and religion as inviolable, even if the state declares a state of siege, and provides for freedom of worship as long as it does not violate the fundamental principles cited in the constitution. It establishes that all citizens are equal under the law with the same rights and obligations, irrespective of their religion. Political parties and labor unions are barred from affiliating with a particular religious group. The constitution recognizes the freedom of religious groups to teach their faith.

The government requires religious groups to obtain licenses. The formal process, which is not often followed, entails providing information on the name, location, type, and size of the organization to the Ministry of Justice.

According to the constitution, there is no religious instruction in public schools. The Ministry of Education regulates and enforces the decree against religious teaching in public schools. There are some private schools operated by religious groups.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

There were no reports of significant government action affecting religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some Muslim community members reported concerns about foreign imams teaching what they termed radical Islamic practices to the local Muslim population.

Religious group representatives reported there was positive societal respect among religious groups, in line with a tradition of religious moderation and tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

There is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the country. Representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, discussed religious freedom, including the presence of foreign Christian and Muslim missionaries in the country, with government officials and representatives of religious groups. These included the minister of justice and the attorney general. Embassy representatives from Dakar also met with and discussed religious activity and religious freedom with representatives of an Islamic women's organization, members of the Islamic Council, U.S. and Brazilian Protestant missionaries, the Bishop of Bissau (the country's leading Roman

Catholic official), and various Catholic priests.

Kenya

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies prohibit religious discrimination and protect religious freedom, including the freedom to practice any religion or belief through worship, teaching, or observance and to debate religious questions. The constitution provides for special *qadi* courts to adjudicate certain types of civil cases based on Islamic law. Human rights and Muslim religious organizations stated that certain Muslim communities, especially ethnic Somalis, were the target of government-directed extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrest, and detention. The government denied directing such actions. Ethnic Somali and other Muslim communities reported difficulties in obtaining government-mandated identification documents, citing heightened requirements.

The Somalia-based terrorist group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (al-Shabaab) carried out attacks in Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, and Lamu Counties and said it had targeted non-Muslims because of their faith. For example, on October 6, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the killings of six non-Muslims in a residential compound in Mandera County. Overall, there were fewer attacks on civilians by al-Shabaab and fewer resulting civilian casualties than in the previous two years.

Muslim minority groups, particularly those of Somali descent, were reportedly harassed by non-Muslims. There were reports of religiously motivated threats of societal violence and intolerance, such as Muslim communities threatening individuals who converted from Islam to Christianity.

The U.S. embassy emphasized the importance of respecting religious freedom in meetings with government officials, especially underscoring the role of interfaith dialogue in stemming religious intolerance and countering violent extremism. Embassy representatives regularly discussed issues of religious freedom, including the importance of tolerance and inclusion, with local and national civic and religious leaders. The embassy urged religious leaders to engage in interfaith efforts to promote religious freedom and respect religious diversity. The embassy supported interfaith efforts to defuse political and ethnic tensions, especially with regard to controversy over the composition of the national elections institution, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. The embassy also encouraged religious and civic leaders to work together across sectarian lines to advance tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 46.8 million (July 2016 estimate), of which approximately 83 percent is Christian and 11 percent Muslim. Groups constituting less than 2 percent of the population include Hindus, Sikhs, and Bahais. Much of the remaining 4-5 percent of the population adheres to various traditional religious beliefs. Protestants account for 48 percent of the population, Roman Catholics 23 percent, and other Christian denominations, including evangelical Protestants and Pentecostals, 12 percent. Most of the Muslim population lives in the northeast and coastal regions, where religion and ethnicity (Somali and Mijikenda, respectively) are often linked. There are approximately 280,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the Dadaab refugee camps, most of whom are ethnic Somali Muslims. There are approximately 160,000 refugees in the Kakuma refugee camp, including Somalis, South Sudanese, and Ethiopians, who practice a variety of religions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution stipulates there shall be no state religion and prohibits religious discrimination. It provides for freedom of religion and belief individually or in communities, including the freedom to manifest any religion through worship, practice, teaching, or observance. The constitution also states individuals shall not be compelled to act or engage in any act contrary to their belief or religion. These rights shall not be limited except by law, and then only to the extent that the limitation is “reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society.”

The constitution requires parliament to enact legislation recognizing a system of personal and family law adhered to by persons professing a particular religion. It specifically provides for *qadi* courts to adjudicate certain types of civil cases based on Islamic law, including questions relating to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance in cases in which “all the parties profess the Muslim religion.” The country’s secular High Court has jurisdiction over civil or criminal proceedings, including those in the *qadi* courts, and accepts appeals of any *qadi* court decision.

According to the law, new religious groups, institutions or places of worship, and faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Registrar of Societies, which reports to the attorney general’s office. Indigenous and traditional religious groups are not required to register, and many do not. In order to register, registrants must have valid national identification documents and pay a fee. Registered religious institutions and places of worship may apply for tax-exempt status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. The law also requires that organizations dedicated to advocacy, public benefit, or the promotion of charity or research to register with the NGO Coordination Board.

A 2013 law formally transferred to the government control of public schools formerly run by religious groups. All public schools have religious education classes taught by government-funded teachers. The national curriculum mandates religious classes, and students may not opt out. Some public schools offer religious education options, usually Christian or Islamic studies, but they are not required to offer both.

The Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology must approve regional radio and television broadcast licenses, including for religious organizations.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

There were reports by human rights groups of extrajudicial killings of members of Muslim groups by the government. Muslim groups said that the government linked the entire Muslim community with the terrorist group al-Shabaab, and discouraged, through intimidation, Muslim community members from reporting police misconduct. Muslim community leaders also stated they faced difficulties obtaining official identification documents, which they needed for voting and access to government and financial services. As religion and ethnicity are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

Human rights groups and prominent Muslim leaders stated the government targeted Muslims for extrajudicial killing, torture and

forced interrogation, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, and denial of freedom of assembly and worship. A July report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported 34 persons last seen in the custody of government security forces had disappeared over the past two years, and 11 bodies of people previously arrested were recovered. The victims were predominantly ethnic Somalis. The HRW report stated that some of the victims were either imams or Islamic education teachers, Islamic education students, or other Muslims with responsibilities in their local mosques. Imams in mosques or Islamic schools where youths had previously been arrested for alleged links with al-Shabaab told HRW they and their colleagues were frequently targeted for questioning, arbitrary arrests and, in some cases, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The domestic NGO Independent Medico Legal Unit (IMLU) stated in early October that it had documented more than 100 civilian deaths because of police action in the prior eight months. Cabinet Secretary for the Interior Joseph Ole Nkaissey stated on October 5, “There is no policy whatsoever within the National Police Service to engage in extrajudicial killings,” and called the NGO statistics unsubstantiated.

The attorney general on May 1 suspended the registration of the Atheists in Kenya Society (AIK) following complaints by some religious leaders led by the Kenya National Congress of Pentecostal Churches (KNCPC) regarding AIK’s February 17 registration. The complaints said AIK was not consistent with the constitution, stating the constitution “recognizes Kenya as a country that believes in God.” The AIK appealed the decision in November.

According to media reports, a reported attack on September 11 by three Muslim women on a Mombasa police station prompted the Mombasa County commissioner to direct on September 16 that women in hijabs would be asked to remove their veils to undergo security checks when accessing public facilities. According to human rights organizations, the commissioner promptly clarified thereafter that only face veils needed to be removed for purposes of identification.

The Court of Appeal ruled in September that Muslim female students be allowed to wear a hijab as part of their school uniforms, overturning a March 2015 High Court verdict that said hijabs were discriminatory because they created disparity among students. The legal case arose from a 2014 lawsuit filed by the Methodist Church seeking to ban female students at St. Paul Kiwanjani High School in Isiolo from wearing the hijab and trousers, arguing the Methodist Church, as the school’s principal funder, should have the final say over student dress. The Court of Appeal decision stated that banning the hijab prevented female Muslim students from practicing their religion and therefore discriminated against them. Prior to the September ruling, government schools sometimes prevented girls from attending classes if they wore headscarves or other religious dress, stating such garments violated school uniform policies. It was unclear if the ruling also affected members of the Akorino religious group, which combines Christian and African styles of worship and requires adherents to cover their heads with turbans for men, (referred to as headgear), and veils for women. Members of 47 Akorino churches verbally protested in March over perceived discrimination in public offices and institutions. The church leaders said the government discriminated against their members in hiring and that public schools occasionally ordered their children to remove their headgear or face suspension.

Although the government formally controls public schools run by religious groups, in practice, however, religious groups still have some say in their management and sometimes contest land ownership. For example, Precious Blood Secondary School in Nairobi County is a public school co-located with a Catholic convent and the teaching staff includes Catholic nuns of the order of Precious Blood Sisters.

Muslim leaders stated the police often linked the whole Muslim community to al-Shabaab. The Independent Policing Oversight Authority, a civilian government body that investigates police misconduct, said that intimidation by police often prevented members of the Muslim community from filing complaints about these incidents.

Muslim leaders reported Muslim citizens often faced particular difficulties acquiring national identification from the National Registration Bureau. Identification cards are required by law and are a prerequisite for voting and access to certain government and financial services. Failure to register is a crime. Muslim communities – including ethnic Somali communities, coastal Muslim

communities, the Nubian community in Nairobi, and the Galjeel community around the Tana River – reported they were often subjected to more requirements than other groups in order to register. These included presentation of birth certificates and citizenship documents of their fathers and grandfathers. They stated they were also required to make special appearances at specified police stations. The government stated the additional scrutiny was necessary to deter illegal immigration and to fight terrorism and that such scrutiny was not intended to discriminate against certain ethnic or religious groups.

In January the government withdrew proposed Religious Societies Rules in response to religious leaders' objections. The attorney general proposed the rules in December 2014 to regulate religious organizations and keep their leaders accountable. The Religion News Service reported in January that the Rules came from concerns that some pastors were “fleecing” followers and that some mosques were becoming “centers of radicalization.” Christian and Muslim leaders stated the Rules would “trample” on religious freedom and turn religious institutions into businesses and political entities. The government withdrew the proposed rules after President Uhuru Kenyatta met with religious leaders. They agreed that religious leaders and the public would be consulted and allowed to provide input for a new draft. The draft had not been finalized at year's end. In the interim, new religious organizations were not able to register with the Registrar of Societies. According to the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, more than 3,000 registration applications for religious groups were pending as of November.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, a government body established in 2013 to determine policies related to the national public education curriculum, began developing a new school curriculum that includes religious education material.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

During terrorist attacks in northeast Kenya, multiple reports stated attackers targeted non-Muslims. On October 6, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack that killed six people in a residential compound in Mandera County, and stated it had targeted and killed Christians. On October 25, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a similar attack that killed 12 people at a hotel in Mandera. A similar attack resulting in the death of four people occurred on January 31 in Lamu County. Overall, there were fewer attacks on civilians by al-Shabaab and fewer resulting civilian casualties than in the previous two years.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of threats of violence towards individuals based on religious attire and expressions of intolerance towards members of other faiths. Given that religion and ethnicity are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being based exclusively on religious identity.

The Daily Nation reported that an improvised explosive device was left at the entrance to a Kianyaga Catholic church in June. The device was discovered and safely detonated following the evacuation of more than 500 Mass attendees. The authorities made no arrests by year's end.

According to NGO sources, some Muslim community leaders and their families were threatened with violence or death, especially some individuals who had converted from Islam to Christianity, particularly those of Somali ethnic origin.

Interreligious NGOs and political leaders said tensions remained high between Muslim and Christian communities because of the terrorist attacks over the previous three years.

Non-Muslims reportedly harassed or treated with suspicion people of Somali origin, who were predominantly Muslim. This was widely attributed to an escalation of intercommunal fear and outrage after the April 2015 Garissa University College attack in which

al-Shabaab terrorists killed 147 people, targeting Christian students in particular, along with other terrorist attacks, predominantly by al-Shabaab, in recent years. Media reports stated that only a small fraction of the previously enrolled 800 students returned when Garissa reopened in January, and that most of those who returned were local and Muslim. The Roman Catholic archbishop of Garissa diocese stated that Christian students were afraid to return.

Media reported that a man who was shot while shielding Christians during an al-Shabaab attack on a bus in December 2015 died during surgery on January 18.

Religious leaders including Anglican, Catholic, evangelical, and others mediated a dispute regarding the political opposition's call to oust the commissioners of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) over allegations of corruption and lack of integrity. After protracted weekly protests aimed at forcing out the IEBC commissioners turned violent in several cities between May and July, religious leaders joined with private sector leaders and international partners to negotiate a dialogue to reform the IEBC. Following a bipartisan dialogue and discussion of reforms to the IEBC through a parliamentary process, members of civil society and trade unions held a Multi Sectoral Forum to call for urgent adoption of the IEBC reforms to ensure the 2017 general elections could be credible, peaceful, and inclusive.

In June the Daily Nation reported that a group of evangelical Protestant bishops would bar political leaders who incited violence from attending church services ahead of the 2017 elections, and encouraged citizens not to vote for leaders spreading hatred. Bishop Mark Kariuki said, "The church will support politicians who embrace peace among our people."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy emphasized the importance of respecting religious freedom in meetings with government officials, especially emphasizing the role of interfaith dialogue in stemming religious intolerance and countering violent extremism (CVE). The Ambassador and embassy staff met frequently with religious leaders and groups, including the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics, the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, the Hindu Council of Kenya, the National Muslim Leaders Forum, and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. In October the Ambassador spoke at a CVE forum organized by a religious organization where he urged civil society and faith-based institutions to build resilient communities able to reject extremists' efforts to pit members of differing faiths against each other.

The Ambassador supported interfaith efforts to defuse political and ethnic tensions, including efforts to resolve the controversy over the credibility and composition of the IEBC.

In January and April the Ambassador met in Mombasa with Muslim leaders to discuss ongoing challenges of religious tolerance and cooperation in the country. He met periodically throughout the year with Muslim leaders in Nairobi. The Ambassador hosted iftars during Ramadan with Muslim, Christian, and Hindu leaders in Nairobi and Mombasa that emphasized the need for dialogue to defuse religious tensions. The embassy also assisted efforts to promote intra-Muslim dialogue on freedom and tolerance.

Embassy officials met individually with religious and civic leaders to urge them to continue to work across sectarian lines to reaffirm the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and diversity. The embassy encouraged faith communities and other societal figures to see religious diversity as a national strength, and not as a source of strife and division.

Lesotho

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the freedom to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate one's religion. The government provided extensive support for schools operated by religious groups, including by paying and certifying all teachers.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. government continued to discuss religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contact with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.0 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Christian Council of Lesotho, approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, evangelical Christians, Methodists, members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Pentecostals. The remaining 10 percent is Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, belongs to indigenous or other religious groups, or is atheist. Many Christians practice traditional indigenous rituals in conjunction with Christianity. There is a small number of Jews, most of whom are not citizens. Muslims live primarily in the northern area of the country. There is no significant correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the freedom to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate one's religion. These rights may be limited by laws in the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality, or protecting the rights of other persons, provided the limitations are the minimum necessary.

The government has no established requirements for recognition of religious groups. By law any group, religious or otherwise, may register as a legal entity with the government, regardless of its purpose, as long as it has a constitution and a leadership committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not. The benefits of registration are administrative. It gives a group legal standing and formalizes its structure under the law. In the absence of registration, religious organizations may operate freely and tend to business as they see fit, but without any of the legal standing or protections of registered organizations.

The education ministry pays and certifies all teachers at government funded schools, including religious schools, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and religious schools. The government does not mandate religious education in schools, and the constitution exempts students at any educational institution from requirements to receive instruction or attend any ceremony or observance associated with a religion not their own. All curricula, including for religious education classes, must be approved by the minister of education.

The country is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Churches owned and operated approximately 80 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Roman Catholic Church, the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and, to a lesser extent, the Methodist Church were the primary operators of religious schools, which were publicly funded. In practice, in any school offering religious education – including all religious schools and some secular schools – the subject was mandatory. Children continued to be permitted to attend schools run by a religious group other than their own, and some families chose this option. Others went to public schools or secular private schools.

The Christian Council of Lesotho continued to be regularly invited to open government ceremonies and meetings. On September 15, the government held its annual national independence prayer service in honor of Lesotho’s 50th year of independence. For the first time, the government included Muslim leaders at the event.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government, typically in the context of broader discussions about human rights. The embassy also maintained regular contact with religious leaders, including with representatives of the Christian Council of Lesotho, an umbrella organization of five Christian churches.

Liberia

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the separation of religion and state and stipulates all persons are entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, except as required by law to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights of others. It also provides for equal protection under the law. A campaign to pass a constitutional amendment that would make the country a “Christian nation” engendered nationwide discussion and a split in a major religious confederation. In January local media reported that a group of Muslim youths protested the demolition of a mosque in Ganta, Nimba County. The mosque, according to news sources, was among buildings demolished by local authorities to enable road reconstruction. Some members of the Muslim community stated county authorities targeted Muslims and did not consult them before destroying the mosque. The government deployed national police to the site of the protest, which ended peacefully. The National Council of Imams reported it was aware of the incident, but did not consider it serious enough to warrant follow-up actions or discussions. The government continued to discourage traditional and religious burial rites to contain the spread of Ebola.

UNICEF reported some prayer camps in the country did not allow members to leave until they paid an undisclosed fee to the preacher. The UN agency also labeled certain religious practices involving children harmful, including trial by ordeal, cleansing or exorcism rituals, and forced initiation into secret societies through kidnapping. There were sporadic, localized quarrels between religious and traditional groups, but because ethnicity and religion were often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize such incidents as solely based on religious identity.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives encouraged government officials to continue to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The embassy organized outreach to young religious leaders, including a discussion on religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 4.3 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, the population is 85.6 percent Christian, 12.2 percent Muslim, 0.6 percent adherents of indigenous religious beliefs, 1.4 percent persons who claim no religion, and less than 1 percent members of other religious groups, including Bahais, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. The Muslim percentage of the population is a source of contention, as unofficial reports and surveys estimate Muslims constitute up to 20 percent of the population. Many members of religious groups incorporate elements of indigenous beliefs into their religious practices. Christian groups include United Methodists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), AME Zion, and a variety of Pentecostal churches.

Christians reside throughout the country. Muslims belonging to the Mandingo and Fula ethnic groups reside throughout the country, while Muslims of the Vai ethnic group live predominantly in the west. Traditional practitioners include the secret Sande and Poro societies, seen both as religious and cultural practitioners and highly influential in the northern, western, and central regions of the country. Other secret cultural or religious societies exist in the southeastern counties, including the Kui Society and Bodio priests.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, and stipulates all persons are entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It states no one shall be hindered in the exercise of these rights except as required by law to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights of others. It also provides for equal protection under the law and prohibits political parties that exclude citizens from membership on the basis of religious affiliation.

The government encourages all religious groups, except for indigenous ones who generally operate under customary law, to register their articles of incorporation and their organizations' statements of purpose. Local religious organizations register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and pay a one-time fee of approximately 5,000 Liberian dollars (\$55) to file their articles of incorporation, and an annual fee of 3,500 Liberian dollars (\$38) for registration and to receive a registration certificate. Foreign religious organizations are charged \$400 (36,400 Liberian dollars) for registration annually, and a one-time fee of \$500 (45,500 Liberian dollars) to file their articles of incorporation. Religious organizations also pay 1,000 to 2,000 Liberian dollars (\$11 to \$22) to the Liberia Revenue Authority for notary services for articles of incorporation to be filed with the MFA and an additional 1,000 Liberian dollars (\$11) to receive a registered copy of the articles. An accreditation of the articles of incorporation is awarded at the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning.

Registered religious organizations, including missionary programs, religious charities, and religious groups, receive tax exemption and duty-free privileges benefits not afforded unregistered groups. Registered groups may also appear in court as a single entity.

The law requires high-level government officials to take an oath ending with the phrase, "So help me God," when assuming office. Christians kiss the Bible and Muslims the Quran on those occasions.

Public schools offer nonsectarian religious and moral education as an elective in all grades.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Some religious groups continued to pursue a constitutional amendment declaring the country a “Christian nation,” an effort that developed in 2015 at the Constitutional Review Conference where a majority of delegates endorsed the proposition, known as Proposition 24. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, along with Catholic, Episcopal, Baptist, Lutheran, and Muslim communities, all opposed the initiative, while some evangelical Christian pastors and members of the national legislature supported it.

In March the National Muslim Council of Liberia (NMCL) briefly suspended its membership within the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL), a council established to assist post-war Liberia engender religious tolerance. According to the NMCL, the suspension was in response to a campaign by the Liberia Council of Churches (LCC) to pass Proposition 24, which the NMCL said would prejudice other religious groups. The LCC had not publicly voiced opposition to the constitutional amendment until May when it officially rejected Proposition 24. This action reduced tensions, according to Muslim leaders, and subsequently the NMCL restored its membership in the IRCL. The LCC rejection of Proposition 24 splintered the group, and one part launched the National Christian Council of Liberia (NCCL) in July. The NCCL continued to advocate for a countrywide vote on Proposition 24 and for its passage. The NMCL stated the events surrounding Proposition 24 ignited an unfortunate stalemate between Muslim and Christian leaders and threatened to endanger the IRCL. While thus far blocked by the president, the vote on the constitutional amendment remained pending at year end.

In January local media reported that a group of Muslim youths protested the demolition of a mosque in Ganta, Nimba County. The mosque, according to news sources, was among buildings demolished by local authorities to enable road reconstruction, but some members of the Muslim community stated county authorities targeted Muslims and did not consult them before destroying the mosque. The government deployed national police to the site of the protest, which ended peacefully. The National Council of Imams stated it was aware of the incident, but did not consider it serious enough to warrant follow-up actions or discussions.

In July Sheikh Abubakar Sumaworo, Mufti of the NMCL, called on members of the legislature, diplomatic missions, and international partners to pressure the government to declare Eid al-Fitr a national holiday. The request to make Eid al-Fitr a national holiday has been pending since 1995. In August Senator Prince Johnson submitted a bill to the legislature that would have made Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha national holidays. Johnson said the bill would enhance harmony among tribal and religious groups, including Muslims. In September Representative Edwin Snowe submitted a similar bill, proposing to make Eid al-Adha a national holiday, which remained pending at year end.

In response to the Ebola epidemic in 2015, the government continued to discourage traditional and religious burial rites that could potentially increase the number of infections.

The government, through city ordinances and presidential proclamations, required businesses and markets, including Muslim-owned or -operated businesses and shops, to remain closed on Sundays for municipal street cleaning and on Christmas in accordance with the law. Muslim-owned businesses stated they viewed the regular Sunday municipal street cleaning as an excuse for the government to force their businesses to close to honor the Christian Sabbath. According to both the National Imam Council of Liberia (NICL) and the NMCL, the ordinances and proclamations were a violation of the constitution and a threat to the peace. The NMCL reported that it brought action in court seeking redress for the forced closures. Since penalties – consisting of fines of up to 200 Liberian dollars (\$2.27) – were not strictly enforced, some Muslim-owned or -operated shops opened for limited hours

on Sundays. Both NICL and NMCL said they would not have a problem with the closing of Muslim-owned businesses on Christmas if the end of Ramadan was also observed as a national holiday.

Government ceremonies commonly included opening and closing prayers. The prayers were usually Christian but occasionally were both Christian and Muslim. In Lofa County, where a large number of Muslims reside, opening and closing prayers were alternately Christian and Muslim.

The government subsidized private schools, most of which were affiliated with either Christian or Muslim organizations, and subsidies were provided proportionally, based on the number of students.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In a December 2015 report UNICEF expressed concern over “prayer camps” in the country. Children were reportedly given to a local preacher after their parents were told the children had been inducted into witchcraft, were possessed, and that their ailments/problems could be solved through prayer. According to UNICEF and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MGCSP), those inside the prayer camps were not allowed to leave until they paid an undisclosed fee to the preacher. The MGCSP and UNICEF worked to reunite more than 300 children with their parents and guardians in River Gee County. Under MGCSP regulations, “institutions” for children cannot be responsible for more than 28 children. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, however, which has jurisdiction over all traditional religious groups, gave the prayer camp in question a certificate to operate and did not intervene in the case.

UNICEF also stated concern for the increasing number of cases of children being accused of witchcraft and/or demonic possession. The UN labeled certain religious practices harmful, including trial by ordeal, cleansing or exorcism rituals, and forced initiation into secret societies through kidnapping.

Sporadic, localized quarrels between religious and traditional groups occurred in remote parts of the country, but because religion and ethnicity were often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. Religious and tribal leaders mediated such incidents and regularly had the support of the National Police.

According to the IRCL, in Lofa County Christians of the Lorma ethnic group predominantly patronized Christian-owned businesses, while local Muslims predominantly patronized Muslim-owned businesses.

According to St. John York, the consultant for Global Inter-faith relations building at the IRCL and former Secretary General of the IRCL, religious tensions were not always localized, and there was a tendency within the IRCL for Christians and Muslims to form opposing blocs on major issues of conflict, despite the organization’s stated purpose of increasing religious dialogue in support of conflict resolution.

Some employers excused Muslims from employment or classes to attend Friday prayers, although there was no legal requirement to do so.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In response to the campaign to declare the country a “Christian nation,” the U.S. Ambassador and embassy staff engaged with government officials, including officials from the Ministry of Justice’s human rights division, members of the legislature, and others to stress the U.S. government’s support of religious freedom and tolerance. The embassy also met with a variety of civil society and religious figures.

During Ramadan the Ambassador delivered greetings from President Obama on an Islamic radio station that underscored the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador met with NCCL representatives to discuss Proposition 24. The Ambassador emphasized the separation of state and religion in both the U.S. and Liberian constitutions. Embassy officials also met with Christian and Muslim religious leaders to discuss tolerance and the importance of religion bringing communities together.

Madagascar

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religious thought and expression and prohibits religious discrimination in the workplace. Other laws protect individual religious freedom against abuses by government or private actors. A study by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found many Muslims born in country were unable to obtain citizenship documentation based on nationality laws limiting the ability of Malagasy women to pass on citizenship to their children when the father is a noncitizen. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) deported 10 Pakistani imams who overstayed their visas. They had been operating a mosque and a Quranic school, which is not permitted on a tourist visa.

Members of both the small, newly-converted Jewish community and the Muslim community reported they were not granted admission into private schools due to their religious affiliation. Members of the Jewish community also reported they were the object of unwelcome attention because of their attire, which includes head coverings for women.

U.S. embassy officials continued to engage regularly with the government on issues affecting religious freedom, including the impact of the nationality code on many Muslims with long-standing ties to the country. The embassy held an internal roundtable discussion with representatives of different religious groups and the MOI to exchange perspectives on religious freedom in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 24.4 million (July 2016 estimate), and according to the last national census in 1993, 52 percent adheres to indigenous beliefs, 41 percent is Christian, and 7 percent is Muslim. Although precise figures are not available, Muslim leaders and local scholars estimate Muslims currently constitute between 20 and 25 percent of the population, although they state it is common to alternate between religious identities, or to mix traditions. Muslims predominate in the northwestern coastal areas, and Christians predominate in the highlands. According to local Muslim religious leaders and secular academics, the majority of Muslims are Sunni. Citizens of ethnic Indian and Pakistani descent and Comorian immigrants represent the majority of Muslims, although there is a growing number of ethnic Malagasy converts.

Local religious groups state nearly half of the population is Christian. The four principal Christian groups are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and the (Presbyterian) Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). Smaller Christian groups include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and local evangelical denominations.

According to Christian groups, the most numerous non-Christian groups are adherents of indigenous religions. In addition, many individuals hold a combination of indigenous and Christian or Muslim beliefs.

There are small numbers of Hindus and Jews across the country. The Jewish community reported it consists of approximately 150 individuals as of September.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religious thought and expression and prohibits religious discrimination in the workplace. Other laws protect individual religious freedom against abuses by government or private actors.

The constitution also provides that such rights may be limited by the need to protect the rights of others or to preserve public order, national dignity, or state security. The labor code prohibits religious discrimination within labor unions and professional associations. Public schools do not offer religious education. There is no law prohibiting or limiting religious education in public or private schools.

The law requires religious groups to register with the MOI. By registering, a religious group receives the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other donations. Once registered, the group may apply for tax exemption each time it receives a gift from abroad. Registered religious groups also have the right to acquire land from individuals to build places of worship; however, the law states landowners should first cede those lands back to the state, and the state will then transfer it to the religious group. To qualify for registration, a group must have at least 100 members and an elected administrative council of no more than nine members, all of whom must be citizens.

Groups failing to meet registration requirements may instead register as “simple associations.” Simple associations may not receive donations or hold religious services, but the law allows them to conduct various types of community and social projects. Associations engaging in additional activities are subject to legal action. Religious associations must apply for a tax exemption each time they receive a donation from abroad. If an association has foreign leadership and/or members, it may form an association “reputed to be foreign.” An association is reputed foreign only if the leader or members of the board include foreign nationals. The law does not prohibit national associations from having foreign nationals as members not in those positions. Such foreign associations may only receive temporary authorizations, subject to periodic renewal and other conditions.

The government requires a permit for all public demonstrations, including religious events such as outdoor worship services.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Muslim leaders continued to state that because of their particular settlement history and mixed marriages over time, Muslims remained negatively affected by the country’s nationality code, which restricts children born of Malagasy mothers and foreign national fathers from obtaining citizenship. While there were no official figures on statelessness, a study by the NGO Focus Development and the UNHCR, which sampled residents in largely Muslim communities between October 2013 and January 2014, estimated that approximately 6 percent of individuals in the communities surveyed were stateless. Of this number, more than 85 percent were born in the country.

The MOI registered seven new religious groups through the middle of October, bringing the total to approximately 283 officially registered groups. Religious groups reported the government did not always enforce registration requirements and in general did not deny requests for registration.

Decisions by local authorities continued to affect the ability of some religious groups to practice their faith, according to religious leaders. Religious leaders also stated that inadequate government enforcement of labor laws resulted in some employers requiring their employees to work during religious services. A Catholic priest in Antananarivo who managed a social services center that caters to factory workers stated some employers failed to respect the labor code provisions requiring a 24-hour break weekly, which affects factory workers' ability to attend worship services.

The government failed to restore or reimburse the value of FJKM-owned Radio Fahazavana's equipment, which had been seized by the former government on the stated ground that the station was associated with deposed President Marc Ravalomanana.

Leadership of the Muslim Malagasy Association, which states it represents all Muslims in Madagascar, reported that some Muslims continued to report difficulty obtaining official documents such as national identity cards and passports because of their Arabic-sounding names. Some Muslims reported religious discrimination when applying for civil service positions. For example, to apply to civil service positions, applicants must provide criminal records, which some Muslims found difficult to obtain from the government.

On September 19, local newspapers reported that the MOI deported 10 foreign imams working in the southeast. According to press reports, they were Pakistani nationals operating a mosque in Vohipeno and a Quranic school in Manakara. The MOI confirmed the deportation, noting that the imams had entered Malagasy territory on a 15-day tourist visa which was extended to a three-month visa at the regional police station. They noted that missionary work or other work-related activities were not permitted on a tourist visa. In November Prime Minister Olivier Mahafaly reaffirmed that the imams were deported because of their illegal immigration status. One of the newspapers added that the MOI started an investigation of the imams when the sacrifice of 200 zebus in Manakara and Vohipeno for the Eid al-Adha celebration on September 11-12 aroused local concerns. While zebu sacrifice is common among animists, Muslims, and occasionally at royal funerals, a single sponsor financing 200 zebus is extremely uncommon which led many in the local community to suspect foreign entities funded the sacrifice.

State-run Malagasy National Television continued to provide free broadcasting to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians on weekends, along with the Muslim community once a week. During Ramadan, the Muslim community was able to purchase additional airtime.

For the fourth year, the government decreed that Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr would be paid holidays for Muslims. Leaders of the Muslim community reported they continued to lobby without success for these holidays to be paid for everyone, rather than just for Muslims, on an equal basis with national holidays based on the Christian faith.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In May after five years of self-study of Judaism, 121 members of a community of formerly messianic Christian individuals underwent formal Orthodox conversions in a process overseen by rabbis from the U.S. and Canada. These took place over a 10-day period and concluded with 12 weddings.

The new converts reported they were subjected to stares and unwelcome comments due to their uncommon attire, and some discrimination by people who learned of their Jewish faith. Some private schools refused to allow them to register their children after discovering they were Jewish. In one case, a landlord cancelled a leasing contract with one of the recent Jewish converts when he found out that the house was going to be used as a religious school.

Members of the Muslim community also reported some of their children were refused admission to private Catholic schools because they were unable to produce a baptismal certificate.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials engaged regularly with the government on issues affecting religious freedom. Embassy officials discussed the nationality code with the prime minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local officials, members of the diplomatic community, and local representatives of the United Nations focused on human rights.

In September the U.S. embassy invited representatives of different religious groups and the MOI to exchange views on religious freedom. In an informal environment, participants openly communicated about the existing relationships among different religious groups in the country. A representative from the MOI answered questions related to the legal framework.

Malawi

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, belief, and thought. The Malawi Human Rights Commission investigated one case of religious discrimination against a Rastafarian student for wearing dreadlocks, but it was unresolved at year's end. Muslim leaders continued to express concern about the role of Christian religious education in state-funded schools and about the impact of staggered school shifts on the ability of students to attend religious education.

Christians, Muslims, and Hindus often participated in business or civil society organizations together and religious organizations and leaders regularly expressed their opinions on political issues, which received coverage in the media.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues, including concerns about the religious curriculum, with leaders of religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 18.6 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, 76.9 percent of the population is Christian and 12.5 percent Muslim. Christian denominations include Roman Catholics at 18.1 percent, Central Africa Presbyterians at 17.4 percent, Seventh-day Adventist/Seventh-day Baptists (the survey groups the two into one category) at 6.9 percent, and Anglicans at 2.6 percent. Another 41.9 percent fall under the "other Christians" category. Individuals claiming no religious affiliation are 0.5 percent and 0.1 percent declare other religions including Hindus, Bahais, Rastafarians, Jews, and Sikhs.

The vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. Most Sunnis of African descent follow the Shafi'i School of Islamic legal thought, while the smaller community of ethnic Asians mostly follows the Hanafi School. There is also a small number of Shia Muslims, mostly of Lebanese origin.

According to the 2008 census, there are two majority Muslim districts, Mangochi (72 percent) and Machinga (64 percent). These neighboring districts at the southern end of Lake Malawi account for more than half of all Muslims in the country. Most other Muslims also live near the shores of Lake Malawi. Christians are present throughout the country.

Traditional cultural practices with a spiritual dimension are sometimes practiced by Christians and Muslims. For example, the *gule*

wamkulu spirit dancers remain of importance among Chewas, who are concentrated in the central region of the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, belief, and thought. These constitutional rights may be limited only when the president has declared a state of emergency.

The law states that holders of broadcast licenses “shall not broadcast any material which is...offensive to the religious convictions of any section of the population.”

Religious groups, like nonprofit organizations, must register with the government to be recognized as legal entities. Registered groups, like other legal entities, may own property and open bank accounts in the group’s name. Groups must submit documentation detailing the structure and mission of their organization and pay a fee of 1,000 kwacha (\$1.34). The government reviews the application for administrative compliance only. According to the government, registration does not constitute approval of religious beliefs, nor is it a prerequisite for religious activities. Religious groups may apply to the Ministry of Finance for tax exemptions regardless of registration status.

Detainees have a right to consult with a religious counselor of their choice.

Religious instruction is mandatory in public primary schools, with no opt-out provision, and is available as an elective in public secondary schools. According to the constitution, eliminating religious intolerance is a goal of education. In some schools, the religious curriculum is a Christian-oriented “Bible knowledge” course, while in others it is an interfaith “moral and religious education” course drawing from the Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Bahai faiths. According to the law, local school management committees, elected at parent-teacher association meetings, decide on which religious curriculum to use. Private Christian and Islamic schools offer religious instruction in their respective faiths. Hybrid “grant-aided” schools are managed by private, usually religious, institutions, but their teaching staffs are paid by the government. In exchange for this financial support, the government chooses a significant portion of the students who attend. At grant-aided schools, a board appointed by the school’s operators decides whether the “Bible knowledge” or the “moral and religious education” curriculum will be used.

Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

A representative of the Rastafarian community reported children with dreadlocks continued to be prohibited from attending public school, where children are required to shave their heads in order to attend. According to the representative, most parents relented and shaved their children’s heads but the children of at least one family continued to be denied access to public school because of their dreadlocks and dropped out of school. The case, and the larger issue of Rastafarian children’s access to education, remained under investigation by the Malawi Human Rights Commission.

Some Muslim groups continued to request the education ministry to discontinue use of the “Bible knowledge” course and use only

the broader-based “moral and religious education” curriculum in primary schools, particularly in predominantly Muslim areas. The issue arose most frequently in grant-aided, Catholic-operated schools.

Muslim organizations continued to express concern about the impact of operating schools in two shifts. Due to rapidly rising enrollment, certain schools in urban areas offered classes in two shifts – one in the morning and another in the afternoon, or staggered beginning and ending times. Muslim groups stated the shifts complicated the delivery of religious education at madrassahs in the afternoon on government school premises.

Most government meetings and events began and ended with a prayer, usually Christian in nature. At larger events, government officials generally invited clergy of different faiths to participate.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Christians, Muslims, and Hindus often participated in business or civil society organizations together. Religious organizations and leaders regularly expressed their opinions on political issues and their statements received coverage in the media. For example, the Livingstonia Synod released a statement in November that discussed the “perpetual failure” of the government to have meaningful dialogue about socio-economic challenges.

Religious groups operated 12 radio and four television stations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador met with representatives of religious groups, including representatives from the Muslim Association of Malawi, the largest Islamic association in the country, to discuss their concerns about the shift system and the “Bible knowledge” course. The Ambassador and embassy officials discussed issues of religious freedom with representatives of religious groups, the interfaith Public Affairs Committee, and members of parliament.

Mali

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and grants individuals freedom of religion in conformity with the law. The law criminalizes abuses against religious freedom. Terrorist groups used violence and launched attacks against civilians, security forces, peacekeepers, and others they reportedly perceived as not adhering to their interpretation of Islam. A July 19 assault claimed by Ansar al-Dine on the military base in Nampala killed 17 soldiers and wounded 35. An attack in May by al-Mourabitoun killed four UN personnel. Although Ministry of Justice officials stated resources were inadequate, the government continued efforts to investigate abuses carried out by violent extremist groups.

Muslim religious leaders frequently condemned extremist interpretations of sharia and non-Muslim religious leaders frequently condemned religious extremism. Religious leaders, including Muslims and Catholics, spoke at an Eid al-Fitr ceremony in July hosted by President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, where they jointly called for peace among all faiths.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives conveyed messages of religious tolerance to government leaders in private and, along with civil society interlocutors, in speeches, at embassy-hosted interfaith events, and at other events. The U.S. embassy

supported training programs to promote religious tolerance and counter violent extremist messaging, and discussed religious freedom with religious leaders, human rights organizations, and civil society throughout the year.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 17.5 million (July 2016 estimate). Muslims constitute an estimated 95 percent of the population. Nearly all Muslims are Sunni and most follow Sufism. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Christians, of whom approximately two-thirds are Roman Catholic and one-third Protestant, groups with indigenous religious beliefs, and those with no religious affiliation. Groups adhering to indigenous religious beliefs reside throughout the country, but are mostly present in rural areas. Many Muslims and Christians also adhere to some aspects of indigenous beliefs. There are fewer than 1,000 individuals in Bamako and an unknown number outside of the capital associated with the Muslim group *Dawa al-Tabligh*.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of religion in conformity with the law.

According to the penal code, any act of discrimination based on religion or any act impeding the freedom of religious observance or worship is punishable with up to five years of imprisonment or 10 years' banishment (prohibition from residing in the country). The penal code also states any religiously motivated persecution of a group of people constitutes a crime against humanity. There is no statute of limitations for such crimes, which may be tried in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The law requires registration of all public associations, including religious groups, except for groups practicing indigenous religious beliefs; however, registration confers no tax preferences or other legal benefits and there is no penalty for failure to register. To register, applicants must submit copies of a declaration of intent to create an association, notarized copies of bylaws, copies of policies and regulations, notarized copies of a report of the first meeting of the association's general assembly, and lists of the names of the leaders of the association with signature samples of three of the leaders. Upon review, the Ministry of Territorial Administration grants the certificate of registration.

The constitution prohibits public schools from offering religious instruction but private schools may do so. Religious schools, which are privately funded and known locally as *medersas* (a variant of *madrassah*), teach religion, but are required to adhere to the standard government curriculum. Informal schools, known locally as *Quranic schools*, which some students attend in lieu of attending public schools, do not follow a government curriculum and offer exclusively religious instruction.

The law defines marriage as secular. Couples who seek legal recognition must have a civil ceremony, which they may follow with a religious ceremony. Under the law, a man may choose between a monogamous or polygamous marriage. The law states that the religious customs of the deceased determine inheritance rights. Civil courts consider these customs when they adjudicate such cases; however, many cases are settled informally.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government collaborated with ICC investigators to prosecute individuals who committed crimes against the country's religious and cultural heritage. On September 27, Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, also known as Abu Tourab, was convicted by the ICC in The Hague and sentenced to nine years in prison for his involvement in the 2012 destruction of nine mausoleums and a mosque in Timbuktu. The case was part of an investigation the ICC launched in response to a July 2012 request by the local government.

At year's end, the investigation into the alleged crimes of Houka ag al-Housseiny had not been completed and the case had not yet gone to trial, reportedly due to challenges collecting sufficient evidence. Domestic and international security forces stated they suspected ag al-Housseiny of having acted as a judge for al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) during the group's occupation of Timbuktu, and of ordering floggings and amputations in that capacity. The government provisionally released him in August 2014. Similarly, authorities made no progress in the investigation into the crimes allegedly committed by Sidi Amar oud Daha, also known as Yoro, whom domestic and international security forces stated they suspected of ordering floggings and amputations while leading the police force of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa during its 2012-2013 occupation of Gao. Authorities released Yoro in 2014 and as of the end of the year he had become a leading member of a government-aligned militia.

By year's end, the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission had not made substantial progress on its core functions or set up full-fledged operations on the ground. The commission stated it had established contact with victims of the country's armed conflict, in addition to presenting its mission and services to affected communities, including victims of religious persecution.

The minister of religious affairs and traditions was responsible for promoting religious tolerance and coordinating national religious activities such as pilgrimages and religious holidays for followers of all religions. In January the minister held a prayer ceremony for Muslims and Christians in Banico calling for peace and reconciliation among religious groups and unity among all residents. In July the minister spoke during a Catholic Mass at the national cathedral in the presence of the Archbishop of Bamako.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Throughout the country, violent armed groups including Ansar al-Dine and its affiliate Macina Liberation Front (MLF), AQIM, and al-Mourabitoun continued to carry out targeted attacks against security forces, UN peacekeepers, civilians, and others they reportedly perceived as not adhering to their interpretation of Islam. Ansar al-Dine claimed responsibility for a July 19 attack on the military base in Nampala that killed 17 soldiers and wounded 35. On May 31, al-Mourabitoun attacked a UN peacekeeping base in Gao, killing one Chinese peacekeeper, two UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) employees, and a French national working with UNMAS. AQIM was suspected of having killed the son of the village chief of the town of Boni on February 8 after he reportedly refused to collaborate with extremist groups.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders frequently and jointly condemned extremist interpretations of Islam.

In July Catholic and Muslim religious leaders spoke at the Eid al-Fitr ceremony hosted by President Keita and called for peace among the different faiths.

Members of religious groups commonly attended the religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with government officials and highlighted the country's potential to use its history of religious tolerance to promote peace in the region. In particular, the embassy encouraged government officials to take steps to prosecute individuals arrested for crimes linked to extremist activities. Embassy officers spoke with a wide range of influential religious leaders and human rights organizations. Embassy officials called on their interlocutors to advocate for tolerance and peace among religions, and organized a number of activities to emphasize the importance of religious tolerance and freedom. A number of prominent religious leaders associated with the country's two chief Sufi and Salafist leaders participated in a U.S. government exchange programs to support themes related to religious diversity and tolerance.

Some of the U.S. embassy's most widely shared social media postings during the year included messages from the Ambassador on the occasions of Ramadan, Easter, Eid al-Fitr, and especially Eid al-Adha. These messages highlighted the country's role as a leader in the Muslim world, with regard to promoting a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Mauritania

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and designates Islam as the sole religion of the citizens and state. Only Muslims may be citizens, and apostasy is a crime punishable by death. On November 15, the Supreme Court heard arguments in the case of blogger Mohamad Cheikh Ould Mohamad Ould Mkheytir, often known as MKheytir. MKheytir was convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death in December 2014. At the November hearing for MKheytir's case, hundreds of individuals protested outside of the courthouse demanding his execution. The case was awaiting judgment from the Supreme Court at the end of the year. On December 20, 2015, several local news outlets reported that the government closed 40 madrassahs located in the Hodh El Garbi. Local authorities stated they closed the madrassahs because of their affiliation with Warsh, an unauthorized Islamic institute. The government reopened the schools on January 6, following demonstrations in many communities. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education (MIATE) continued to collaborate with independent Islamic religious groups to combat extremism, radicalization, and terrorism through a series of workshops in all 15 provinces.

On September 12, during the annual Eid al-Adha observance, Imam Ahmedou Ould Lemrabott Ould Habibou Rahman, the imam of the Grand Mosque of Nouakchott, warned of what he called the spread and growing threat of Shia Islam in the country. The imam also stated government authorities should sever ties with Iran in order to stop the spread of Iranian Shia Islam. On March 30, the Mauritanian Bar Association, in collaboration with the Muslim World Lawyers Organization, held a one-day seminar in Nouakchott on the role of Islamic law in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

U.S. embassy representatives, including the Ambassador and senior visiting U.S. government officials, discussed religious tolerance with senior government officials, including the president and prime minister. Embassy officials raised the MKheytir apostasy case with authorities on multiple occasions. The Ambassador urged authorities to ensure that judicial proceedings were transparent. The Ambassador hosted two iftars at which he discussed religious tolerance with government officials and religious and civil society leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 3.7 million (July 2016 estimate). Nearly all are Sunni Muslims. There are very small numbers of non-Muslims, mostly Christians and a small number of Jews, almost all of whom are foreigners.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the sole religion of its citizens and the state. Only Muslims may be citizens. Persons who convert from Islam lose their citizenship.

The law and legal procedures are derived from a combination of French civil law and sharia. The judiciary consists of a single system of courts that uses principles of sharia in matters concerning the family and secular legal principles in all other matters.

The law prohibits apostasy. A Muslim convicted of apostasy who does not recant within three days may be sentenced to death and have his or her property confiscated. The government, however, has never applied capital punishment in this regard.

The government does not register Islamic religious groups, but all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including humanitarian and development NGOs affiliated with religious groups, must register with the Ministry of Interior. NGOs must also agree to refrain from proselytizing or otherwise promoting any religion other than Islam. The law requires the Ministry of Interior to authorize all group meetings, including non-Islamic religious gatherings, in advance, even those held in private homes.

By law, the MIATE is responsible for enacting and disseminating fatwas, fighting “extremism,” promoting research in Islamic studies, organizing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, and monitoring mosques. The government appoints the six imams of the High Council of Islam, who advise the government on conformity of legislation to Islamic precepts. The government also appoints the High Council for Fatwa and Administrative Appeals, which has sole authority to regulate fatwa issuance and resolve related disputes among citizens and between citizens and public agencies.

The law requires members of the Constitutional Council and the High Council of Magistrates to take an oath of office that includes a promise to God to uphold the law of the land in conformity with Islamic precepts.

A ministerial decree requires public schools and private secondary schools – but not international schools – to teach four hours of Islamic studies per week. Religious instruction in Arabic is required for students seeking the baccalaureate.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On November 15, the Supreme Court heard arguments in the case of blogger Mohamad Cheikh Ould Mohamad Ould Mkheytir, often known as MKheytir. MKheytir was convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death in December 2014. At the November hearing for MKheytir’s case, hundreds of individuals protested outside of the courthouse demanding his execution. One of MKheytir’s defense lawyers reported to the media that he received death threats for representing the accused. Several of the prosecuting lawyers threatened the justices in court if they failed to affirm the death sentence. The November hearing followed a ruling in April by the Regional Court of Appeals in Nouadhibou, which affirmed the death sentence for MKheytir, but determined that his recantation in the appellate court was proper and timely. In 2013, MKheytir published an online article, *Religion and*

Religiosity and the Blacksmiths, that the government said criticized the Prophet Muhammad and implicitly blamed the nation's religious establishment for the plight of the country's *forgeron* (blacksmith) caste. This caste has traditionally suffered discrimination. The case was awaiting judgment from the Supreme Court at the end of the year.

On December 20, 2015, several local news outlets reported that the government closed 40 madrassahs in the Hodh El Garbi district in the southeast, 680 miles from Nouakchott. Local authorities stated they closed the madrassahs on the basis of their affiliation with Warsh, an unauthorized Islamic institute. The government reopened the schools on January 6, following demonstrations in many communities.

The MIATE continued to collaborate with independent Islamic religious groups to combat extremism, radicalization, and terrorism through a series of workshops in all 15 provinces.

Authorized churches were able to conduct services within their premises, but could not proselytize publicly. No public expression of religion except Islam was allowed.

An unofficial government requirement restricted non-Muslims worship to the few recognized Christian churches. There were Roman Catholic and other Christian churches in Nouakchott, Kaedi, Atar, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Mauritanian citizens could not attend non-Islamic religious services, which remained restricted to foreigners. By the end of the year, the Ministry of Interior had not acted on a request by a group of foreign Protestants for authorization to build their own place of worship. The group first sought authorization to construct a place of worship in 2006, and then renewed the process in 2012, but was still awaiting approval as of the end of the year.

Although there remained no specific legal prohibition against non-Muslims proselytizing, in practice the government prohibited such activity through the broad interpretation of the constitution stating Islam shall be the religion of the people and of the state.

The possession of non-Islamic religious materials remained legal, although the government continued to prohibit their printing and distribution. The government maintained a Quranic television channel and a Quranic radio station. Both stations sponsored regular programming on themes of moderation in Islam.

The government continued to provide funding to mosques and Islamic schools under its control. The government paid monthly salaries of 50,000 ouguiyas (\$152) to 200 imams who passed an examination conducted by a government-funded panel of imams and heads of mosques and Islamic schools. It also paid monthly salaries of 25,000-100,000 ouguiyas (\$76-\$303) to 30 members of the National Union of Mauritanian Imams, an authority established to regulate the relationship between the religious community and the MIATE.

Islamic classes remained part of the educational curriculum, but attendance at the classes was not mandatory. The results in the classes did not count significantly in the national exams that determine further placement. Additionally, many students reportedly did not attend these religious classes for various ethnolinguistic, religious, and personal reasons. Students were able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas despite missing these classes, provided they performed otherwise satisfactorily in other mandatory subjects. The Ministry of National Education and the MIATE continued to reaffirm the importance of the Islamic education program at the secondary level; the government reportedly considered religious education a tool to protect children and society against extremism and to promote Islamic culture.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

During the annual Eid al-Adha observance, Imam Ahmedou Ould Lemrabott Ould Habibou Rahman, the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Nouakchott, warned of what he called the spread and growing threat of Shia Islam in the country. The imam also stated

government authorities should sever ties with Iran in order to stop the spread of Iranian Shia Islam.

On March 30, the Mauritanian Bar Association, in collaboration with Muslim World Lawyers Organization, organized a one-day seminar in Nouakchott on the role of Islamic law in the fight against terrorism and religious extremism. The seminar provided presentations and lectures related to the role of Islamic law in maintaining peaceful coexistence and global security.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives, including the Ambassador and senior visiting U.S. government officials, discussed religious tolerance with senior government officials, including the president and prime minister. Embassy officials raised the MKheytir apostasy case with authorities on multiple occasions. The Ambassador urged authorities to ensure that judicial proceedings were transparent.

The Ambassador met regularly with religious leaders to discuss religious tolerance. The Ambassador hosted an iftar in Kiffa, the capital city of the Assaba District on June 22, which was attended by the Governor of Assaba, the Mayor of Kiffa, journalists, traditional leaders, and civil society representatives. The Ambassador held a second iftar at his residence in Nouakchott the following evening, attended by the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of Islamic affairs, other senior government officials, journalists, and civil society leaders. A U.S.-based imam, visiting the country on a U.S. government-sponsored speaker program, spoke at both iftars about the necessity of involving religious leaders in encouraging freedom and equality among religious groups. The imam spoke about the necessity for the religious leaders to be involved and engaged in order to use the practice of tolerance in Islam to spread freedom, equality, and democratic practices. The Ambassador's remarks at the iftars focused on the value of religious tolerance and the importance of interfaith dialogue based on mutual respect.

Mauritius

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on creed and provides for religious freedom, including the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religious beliefs. The government grants subsidies to six religious groups, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, based on their relative numbers in the population. Other groups must register with the government to obtain tax-exempt status but receive no subsidies. Christians and Muslims stated they were underrepresented in the civil service and government, including at the highest levels. The government limited the number of foreign missionaries allowed to work in the country.

Tensions between Hindus and Muslims continued; however, unlike in previous years, there were no reports of interreligious violence. On November 20, unknown individuals vandalized two mosques and a predominantly Muslim cemetery in the Savanne District. On December 30, unknown individuals vandalized a Tamil temple in Port Louis. There were no developments in the September 2015 case in which two Muslim men vandalized a Hindu temple, which was followed by five Hindu men vandalizing a mosque in the south of the island. The Council of Religions, a local organization composed of representatives from 18 different faiths and denominations, hosted regular religious ceremonies and celebrations to foster mutual understanding and enhance interfaith collaboration among faith communities.

The embassy promoted religious tolerance and understanding through engagement with government officials and with religious leaders. The Charge d'Affaires hosted an iftar with Muslim civil society and religious leaders to highlight religious tolerance and emphasize ways to continue to foster interreligious tolerance. Embassy representatives attended numerous religious holiday

ceremonies of different faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.3 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010 local census, approximately 48 percent is Hindu, 26 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 6 percent other Christian religious groups including Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of the Assemblies of God. The remaining 3 percent includes Buddhists, animists, individuals who reported no religious affiliation, and others. More than 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni.

On the main island, the population of Port Louis is primarily Muslim and Catholic, while the majority of the remainder of the island's population is Hindu. The island of Rodrigues is approximately 90 percent Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice Buddhism, Anglicanism, or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent are primarily Catholic.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on creed and provides for freedom of thought and religion including the right of individuals to change their religion or belief, and to manifest and propagate their religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, alone or in community and in private or in public. These rights may be subject to limitations to protect public order, safety, morality, or health, or the rights of others. The constitution also bars oaths contrary to an individual's religious belief and bars compulsory religious education or attendance at religious ceremonies in schools. It gives religious groups the right to establish schools and to provide religious instruction therein to members of that group; these institutions are open to the population in general as well. Citizens can file complaints of religious discrimination with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), and the EOC can initiate investigations on its own if it believes a citizen's rights may have been infringed. Legislative election candidates must identify themselves according to one of the four national communities cited in the constitution: Hindus, Muslims, Sino-Mauritians, or general population.

A parliamentary decree recognizes the six religious groups that were present prior to independence: Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims. These groups receive annual lump sum payments from the finance ministry based on the number of their adherents as determined by the voluntary self-identification of individuals in the 2010 census. The registrar of associations registers new religious groups, which must have a minimum of seven members with designated leadership responsibilities. The finance ministry grants these new groups tax-exempt privileges. Although registration of religious groups is required, the law does not prescribe penalties for unregistered groups.

Religious groups must obtain both a residence permit and a work permit for each foreign missionary. The prime minister's office is the final authority on the issuance of these documents. While there are no explicit restrictions, there are unofficial limits on the overall number of missionaries per religious group who are issued the requisite visas and work permits. The government grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extensions.

Religious education is allowed in public and private schools, at both the primary and high school levels. Students are permitted to opt out and civic education classes are provided for non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Some Christians and Muslims continued to state that the predominance of Hindus in the civil service resulted in “interference” in the government promotion system, and prevented Christians and Muslims from reaching higher level positions in the civil service. More generally, non-Hindus often stated they were underrepresented in government. There were no reliable statistics available on the numbers of different religious groups represented in the civil service.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There continued to be tensions between Hindus and Muslims; however, unlike in previous years, there were no outbursts of interreligious violence reported.

On November 20, unknown individuals vandalized two mosques and a predominantly Muslim cemetery in the Savanne District. The individuals wrote graffiti translated from Creole to “Trump for them,” with the implication that (then-President-elect) Trump supported Hindus and was against Muslims. Also written was “Gabbar is BACK,” a reference to a famous Bollywood antagonist famed for murdering his enemies. A trident, a symbol frequently associated with Lord Shiva, the Destroyer, and the letters HSS were also written. According to speculation in the press, HSS was a reference to the Hindu Power Party (HSS), although the group’s leader reportedly denied involvement. The police investigation of the incident remained open at year’s end.

On December 30, police received a report that unknown individuals vandalized a Tamil temple. According to the president of the temple, the incidents took place between December 23 and December 30. Graffiti on the temple said that Mauritius represented the new ISIS chapter. The vandals also destroyed Deity figurines. Investigation of the incidents continued at year’s end, with no arrests made.

There were no developments in the September 2015 case in which two Muslim men vandalized a Hindu temple, which was followed by retaliation from five Hindu men who vandalized a mosque in the south of the island.

The Council of Religions, a local organization composed of representatives from 18 different faiths and denominations, hosted regular religious ceremonies and celebrations to foster mutual understanding and enhance interfaith collaboration among faith communities. In September the Council of Religions held a workshop on “Challenges on Interfaith Dialogue” to encourage different religious groups to engage in dialogue with each other.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy representatives continued to pursue outreach and engage the government on religious freedom issues, advocating continued respect for religious diversity and tolerance. Embassy representatives met with law enforcement officials to better understand religious tensions related to recent incidents of vandalism. The Charge d’Affaires hosted an annual iftar with Muslim civil society and religious leaders to highlight religious tolerance and ways to continue to foster interreligious tolerance. Embassy representatives regularly attended religious ceremonies and celebrations of the Council of Religions and various religious groups to support religious diversity. The embassy provided funding for the Council of Religion’s project to produce 300 booklets entitled “Peace and Interfaith Dialogue”.

Mozambique

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the right to practice or not to practice religion freely and prohibits discrimination based on religion. These and other rights may only temporarily be suspended or restricted in the event of a declaration of a state of war, siege, or emergency. The constitution prohibits faith-based political parties and the use of religious symbols in politics. Religious groups have the right to organize, worship, and operate schools. The government continued to register religious groups and organizations; however, a Catholic Church representative said that authorities in certain provinces required some dioceses to register locally in what he said was a violation of a 2012 agreement between the central government and the Holy See. The Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches continued to seek the return of properties the government seized in the years after independence.

In February four unidentified individuals fatally shot an Apostolic Faith Mission pastor in the central city of Chimoio. The pastor's widow said her husband may have been targeted because of a conflict with other churches.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and the return of seized church property with the justice minister and the national director of religious affairs. Embassy representatives also discussed the importance of religious tolerance with Catholic Church representatives and religious leaders in Nampula.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 25.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the U.S. government, 28 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 16 percent Zionist Christian, 12 percent Protestant, 18 percent Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 8 percent other religious groups including the Bahai Faith, Judaism, and Hinduism. Approximately 18 percent does not profess any religion or belief. According to Christian and Muslim religious leaders, a significant portion of the population adheres to syncretic indigenous religious beliefs, characterized by a combination of African traditional practices and aspects of either Christianity or Islam, a category not included in government estimates. Muslim leaders state their community accounts for 25-30 percent of the total population, a statistic frequently reported in the press.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular state. It prohibits religious discrimination, provides for the right of citizens to practice or not practice a religion, and stipulates that no individuals may be deprived of their rights because of religious faith or practice. Political parties are constitutionally prohibited from using names or symbols associated with religious groups. The constitution protects places of worship and the right of religious groups to organize, worship, and pursue their religious objectives freely and to acquire assets in pursuit of those objectives. It recognizes the right of conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons. These and other rights may only temporarily be suspended or restricted in the event of a declaration of a state of war, siege, or emergency, in accordance with the terms of the constitution.

The law requires all nongovernmental organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs (MOJ). Under the law, “religious organizations” are charities or humanitarian organizations, whereas “religious groups” refer to particular denominations. Religious groups register at the denominational level or at the congregational level if they are unaffiliated. Religious groups and organizations register by submitting an application, providing identity documents of the local leaders, and submitting documentation of declared ties to any international religious group or organization. There are no penalties for failure to register; however, religious groups and organizations must show evidence of registration to open bank accounts, file for exemption of customs duties for imported goods, or submit visa applications for visiting foreign members.

A 2012 accord between the national government and the Holy See governs the Catholic Church’s rights and responsibilities in the country. The agreement recognizes the Catholic Church as a “legal personality” and recognizes the Church’s exclusive right “to regulate ecclesiastical life and to nominate people for ecclesiastical posts.” The agreement requires Catholic Church representatives to register with the government to benefit from the Church’s status. The accord also gives the Catholic Church the exclusive right to create, modify, or eliminate ecclesiastical boundaries; however, it stipulates that ecclesiastical territories must report to a Church authority in the country.

The law permits religious organizations to own and operate schools. The law forbids religious instruction in public schools.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The MOJ registered 19 new religious groups and three new religious organizations between January and August. There were a total of 859 religious groups and 219 religious organizations registered.

A Catholic Church representative said that provincial authorities in certain provinces violated the 2012 accord with the Holy See by requiring local dioceses to register with local authorities separately or present some form of proof of previous registration. The Catholic Church continued to pursue the return of property the government seized following independence. A Catholic Church representative reconfirmed that the government had returned approximately 60 percent of property seized from the Church after independence as of August and that the Church continued negotiations regarding the remaining 40 percent.

The Greek Orthodox Church continued to seek the return of the Ateneu (Athenaeum), a church property in central Maputo seized by the government after independence and renamed the Palacio dos Casamentos (Wedding Palace).

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In February four unidentified men fatally shot Apostolic Faith Mission Pastor Joao Jofrisse during a church service in his home in the central city of Chimoio. Jofrisse’s widow, Eugenia Chinhamandoa, said he may have been killed because of competition for members with other churches.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and the return of seized property with the justice minister and the national director of religious affairs. The Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed the importance of political and religious tolerance to promote peace and security with Catholic Church representatives who participated in international mediation between the government and the main opposition party. Embassy officers also discussed the status of religious

freedom and expressed U.S. government support for this fundamental right with religious leaders in Nampula.

Namibia

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of belief and the right to practice, profess, and promote any religion. In July nine South African Muslims were deported from the southern part of the country for allegedly engaging in “religious work” without having been admitted into the country with the proper visa. Namibian Islamic Judicial Council (NIJC) head Sheikh Desmond Dawid Tjipanga opposed the deportation stating that it was an act of discrimination against Muslims. Some religious groups complained about the difficulty in obtaining visas for foreign coreligionists to enter the country.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials engaged with religious groups and leaders to discuss religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.4 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 97 percent of the population identifies as Christian. According to church statistics and the government’s 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, approximately 50 percent identify as Lutheran and 20 percent as Catholic. Other groups, including Anglican, various Reformed denominations, Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, evangelicals, charismatics, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), make up the remaining 27 percent of the population that is Christian. The number of Pentecostal and charismatic churches is growing. Some Zionist churches combine Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Muslims, Bahais, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and other non-Christians together constitute approximately 3 percent of the population and reside primarily in urban areas.

Many members of the Himba and San ethnic groups combine indigenous religious beliefs with Christianity. Muslims are mostly Sunni and are predominantly immigrants from elsewhere in Africa, South Asia, or recent converts.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution specifies the country is a secular state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief, as well as the right to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain, and promote any religion. These rights may be subject to “reasonable restrictions” justified by interests such as “the sovereignty and integrity of Namibia, national security, public order, decency or morality.”

The law allows recognition of any religious group as a voluntary association, without the need to register with the government. A voluntary association is required to have a written constitution stating its purpose, be membership-based, be a legal person, and have a plan for disposing of its assets if it ceases operation. Religious groups may also register as nonprofit organizations (an

“association without gain”) with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Under the law, a nonprofit organization must have a minimum of seven members and two directors, an auditor, and a registered address in the country, and must comply with all regulations of domestic corporate law. Both religious groups registered as nonprofit organizations and religious groups formed as voluntary associations are exempt from paying taxes. Other faith-based organizations may also register as welfare organizations with the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS). Under MoHSS regulations, a welfare organization must have a minimum of seven members, an auditor, and a constitution. If the group meets the objectives of a welfare organization, the MoHSS will issue a letter of certification. There is no difference in the application process between religious and nonreligious groups. A welfare organization may apply to the Department of Inland Revenue to receive tax-exempt status. Once registered as a welfare organization, a religious group may seek to obtain communal land at a reduced rate, which is at the discretion of traditional authorities or town councils, based on whether they believe the organization’s use of the land will benefit the community.

The constitution permits religious groups to establish private schools provided no student is denied admission based on creed. The government school curriculum contains a nonsectarian “religious and moral education” component that includes education on moral principles and human rights and introduces students to a variety of African traditions and religions, as well as world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Bahai Faith, and Rastafarianism.

Similar to other foreigners seeking to work in the country, religious workers must obtain an appropriate visa. Work visa requirements include proof of educational qualifications, police clearance certificate from country of origin, and – for visas over three months – proof of a contract.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In July the government deported nine South African Muslims from the southern part of the country for allegedly engaging in “religious work” without a proper visa. The individuals entered the country with tourist visas, but the government stated they intended to engage in proselytizing and religious work among Namibian Muslim groups; they were reportedly performing daily prayers at a mosque in the Keetmanshoop area when they were arrested. According to media sources, NIJC head Sheikh Desmond Dawid Tjipanga said he suspected the group was placed under surveillance by police and officials from the Department of Immigration when the individuals entered the country. The Keetmanshoop area of the Immigration Directorate confirmed to media that the South Africans were deported but did not give a reason. Tjipanga opposed the deportation stating that it was an act of discrimination against Muslims.

Some religious groups complained about difficulty in obtaining work visas for foreign coreligionists and religious workers to enter the country to engage in religious activities. The government, however, also strictly enforced work visa requirements for nonreligious, nontourist foreign visitors.

The government periodically included religious leaders in discussions regarding issues affecting the country and in national events. President Hage Geingob held consultations with leaders from major religious groups in the country, including from various Christian denominations and from the Muslim community, to discuss opportunities for collaboration in fighting poverty.

The University of Namibia and the Namibia University of Science and Technology in Windhoek, both government-supported institutions, provided rooms to religious groups and students to use for prayer and meetings.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with religious leaders from the Christian, Bahai, and Muslim communities to better understand the country's religious landscape and any potential issues of discrimination such as difficulties in obtaining visas.

Niger

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion and worship consistent with public order, social peace, and national unity. It provides for the separation of state and religion and prohibits religiously affiliated political parties. The government prohibits full-face veils in Diffa Region under state of emergency provisions to prevent concealment of bombs and weapons. The government also prohibits open-air, public proselytization events due to stated safety concerns. According to media sources, President Mahamadou Issoufou, during his reelection campaign in February, said he would regulate the expansion of Wahhabism in the country but took no action as of year's end.

According to religious leaders, cooperation between Christian and Muslim communities continued to improve in the wake of the violent and deadly January 2015 protests in the cities of Niamey and Zinder. The unrest was sparked by President Issoufou's public statement "We are all Charlie" at an event in Paris commemorating the *Charlie Hebdo* killings. While the majority of the population adheres to the Maliki interpretation of Sunni Islam, Muslim leaders reported Wahhabism grew in size and influence during the year. The head of the Islamic Association of Niger and the Archbishop of Niamey urged mutual cooperation on National Cleanup Day in October, highlighting the importance of cleanliness and equating clean communities with faith.

In July the U.S. Second Lady met with officials from the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and leaders from a variety of religious groups to discuss the importance of religious tolerance, diversity, and respect in combating extremism and volatility in the region. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives continued to advocate for religious freedom and tolerance through meetings with Muslim leaders and support of inter- and intrafaith dialogues throughout the country. The embassy hosted events and organized outreach activities and exchange programs with religious and civil society leaders to promote religious tolerance and encourage interfaith dialogue, including several interfaith iftars.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 18.6 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the MOI, more than 98 percent of the population is Muslim. Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni and 5 percent Shia. Roman Catholic and Protestant groups account for less than 2 percent of the population. There are a few thousand Bahais, who reside primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River. A very small percentage of the population adheres primarily to indigenous religious beliefs. Some individuals adhere to syncretic religious beliefs that combine traditional indigenous practices with Islam.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination, specifies separation of religion and state as an unalterable principle, and stipulates equality under the law for all regardless of religion. It provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship and expression of faith consistent with public order, social peace, and national unity. The constitution also states no religion or faith shall claim political power or interfere in state affairs and bans political parties based on religious affiliation.

Nongovernmental organizations, including religious organizations, must register with the MOI. Registration approval is based on submission of required legal documents, such as the group's charter, and vetting of the organization's leaders. Although some unregistered religious organizations reportedly operate without authorization in remote areas, only registered organizations are legally recognized entities. The MOI requires clerics speaking to a large national gathering either to belong to a registered religious organization or to obtain a special permit. Nonregistered groups are not legal entities and are not permitted to operate.

Registered religious groups wishing to obtain permanent legal status must undergo a three-year review and probationary period before the Office of Religious Affairs, which is under the MOI, grants a change in legal status from probationary to permanent.

The constitution specifies the president, the prime minister, and the president of the national assembly must take an oath on the holy book of his or her religion. By law, other senior government officials are also required to take religious oaths upon entering office.

The government prohibits full-face veils in Diffa Region under state of emergency provisions to prevent concealment of bombs and weapons.

The government prohibits open-air, public proselytization events for all religious groups due to expressed safety concerns. There is no restriction on private peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual's personal religious beliefs from one religious faith to another, as long as the group espousing the transition is registered with the government.

The establishment of any religious school must receive the concurrence of both the MOI and the relevant Ministry of Education. Private Quranic schools are unregulated. There is no religious education in public schools.

There are no restrictions on the issuance of visas for visiting religious leaders; however, permanent residency of foreign religious leaders must be approved by the MOI.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to media sources, President Issoufou, during his reelection campaign in February, said he would regulate the expansion of Wahhabism in the country but took no action as of year's end. Then-Interior Minister Hassoumi Massaoudou stated during the presidential campaign that there was a need to organize and regulate the construction of Wahhabi mosques in the country.

Media sources reported campaigns for the presidential and parliamentary elections in February often opened with the Fatiha, the proclamation of faith at the beginning of the Quran.

The Commission for the Organization of the Hajj and Umrah attempted to redress the poor organization of the Hajj by local travel agencies by facilitating travel to Saudi Arabia. Some pilgrims reported the commission made the Hajj less burdensome; however, others said they were delayed in their departure to or from Saudi Arabia due to logistical challenges. Several pilgrims reported they

were left stranded at an airport in Niamey after the Commission for the Organization of the Hajj and Umrah failed to pay the contracted air carrier. In October the commissioner was subsequently dismissed.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to religious leaders, cooperation between Christian and Muslim communities continued to improve in the wake of the violent and deadly January 2015 protests in the cities of Niamey and Zinder. The unrest was sparked by President Issoufou's public statement "We are all Charlie" at an event in Paris commemorating the *Charlie Hebdo* killings.

While the majority of the population adheres to the Maliki interpretation of Sunni Islam, Muslim leaders reported Wahhabism grew in size and influence during the year. Media sources reported thousands of Wahhabi mosques and madrasas were built over the past few years.

The head of the Islamic Association of Niger and the Archbishop of Niamey urged mutual cooperation on National Cleanup Day in October, highlighting the importance of cleanliness and equating clean communities with faith.

The Muslim-Christian Interfaith Forum remained active in all regions of the country. The forum promoted cooperation among religious leaders from a range of religious groups, and members of the forum met regularly to discuss community peace and other matters of mutual concern.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended one another's festivities during their respective holidays. Bibles in Arabic and the major local languages were available for sale in the local markets.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In July the U.S. Second Lady visited Niamey and met with officials from the MOI, as well as leaders from a variety of religious groups, to discuss the importance of religious tolerance, diversity, and respect in combating extremism and volatility in the region.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives continued to advocate for religious freedom and tolerance through meetings with Muslim leaders and support of inter- and intrafaith dialogues throughout the country. The Ambassador hosted an iftar, which included Muslim, Christian, and Bahai leaders, government officials, and members of civil society, where she delivered remarks emphasizing the importance of interfaith tolerance. The embassy continued to engage with an interreligious council composed of Muslim and Christian leaders.

Nigeria

Executive Summary

The constitution bars the federal and state governments from adopting a state religion, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate, or change their religion. Human rights groups reported the federal government often failed to prevent, quell, or respond to violence affecting religious groups, particularly in the northeastern and central regions of the country. In November at least nine people were killed in Kano State in clashes between police and members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), the country's largest Shia group. In July the Kaduna State government released the results of its investigation of the December 2015 clash between the military and the IMN, in which at least 348 IMN members and one soldier

died. More than 200 IMN members were awaiting trial as a result of that incident; the government did not charge any members of the army. Human rights groups called for the prosecution of military members responsible. The Kaduna State government banned the IMN. On January 4, a Kano State Upper Sharia Court sentenced cleric Abdulaziz Dauda and nine followers to death for making blasphemous statements against the Prophet Muhammad; the case was under appeal. In January a sharia court in Kano State confirmed the death sentences of an imam and eight others for blasphemy. Also in January a Kano sharia court convicted a Tijaniyah Sufi Muslim cleric and five others of blasphemy, and sentenced them to death. Both cases were on appeal at year's end. Religious groups reported instances in which neither the state and nor federal governments investigated, prosecuted, or punished those responsible for abuses committed due to religious intolerance, such as the November 3 release of five Muslim men arrested for the June 2 killing of a Christian woman in Kano. Members of regional minority religious groups said some state and local government laws continued to discriminate against them, including by limiting their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and obtaining government employment.

The terrorist organization Boko Haram continued to carry out numerous attacks, committing mass killings and often targeting civilians. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Nigeria Watch estimated activities by Boko Haram resulted in the deaths of 2,900 people, including Boko Haram members, a decrease from the 4,780 deaths recorded in 2015.

There were incidents of killings and other violence, motivated in part by religion, although observers stated there were other contributing factors, including ethnicity, conflict over grazing rights, corruption, and criminality. In April herdsmen killed more than 300 people in the predominantly Christian Agatu community in Benue State. In Kaduna State, suspected Fulani herdsmen killed 40 people in October and 42 people in November. In October Christians reportedly killed 14 Fulani herdsmen in Kaduna State. There were religiously motivated attacks by mobs; one instance led to the deaths of eight Muslims in Zamfara State when Muslim students burned down the home of another Muslim for helping a Christian accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Another mob killed a Christian man in May in Niger State for posting a statement considered blasphemous against Islam. A Christian vendor was also killed in Kano State for preventing a Muslim from praying in front of her shop. Muslim leaders publicly condemned the activities of Boko Haram as un-Islamic.

U.S. embassy and consulate general officials discussed and advocated for religious freedom and tolerance with National Security Advisor Babagana Munguno, Chief of Army Staff Tukur Buratai, Sultan of Sokoto Sa'ad Abubakar, and President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Supo Ayokunle. Embassy officials encouraged these representatives to address interreligious violence and called for timely legal action against perpetrators of violence. In visits to the country, the U.S. Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the U.S. Ambassador, and other officials met with President Muhammadu Buhari, state governors, senior federal and state government officials, leaders of religious groups, and NGOs to discuss religious freedom, affirm support for efforts to combat Boko Haram, and review efforts to improve relations between Christians and Muslims.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 186 million (July 2016 estimate). The Nigerian government does not track religion in census data, but a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life estimated the population to be 49.3 percent Christian and 48.8 percent Muslim, while the remaining 2 percent belong to other or no religions. Many individuals combine indigenous beliefs and practices with Islam or Christianity. A 2010 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life report found 38 percent of the Muslim population self-identified as Sunni and 12 percent as Shia, with the remainder declining to answer or identifying as "something else" (5 percent) or "Just a Muslim" (42 percent). Included among the Sunnis are several Sufi groups, including Tijaniyah and Qadiriyyah. There are also Izala (Salafist) minorities and small numbers of Ahmadi Muslims. Christian

groups include evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other groups include Jews, Bahais, and individuals who do not follow any religion.

The Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups are most prevalent in the predominantly Muslim northern states. Significant numbers of Christians, including some Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri, also reside in the north, and Christians and Muslims reside in approximately equal numbers in central Nigeria and in the southwestern states, including Lagos, where the Yoruba ethnic group, whose members include both Muslims and Christians, predominates. In the southeastern states, where the Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Christian groups, including Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists, constitute the majority. In the Niger Delta region, where the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups predominate, Christians form a substantial majority, and a very small minority of the population is Muslim. Evangelical Christian denominations are growing rapidly in the central and southern regions. Ahmadi Muslims maintain a small presence in several cities, including Lagos and Abuja.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution stipulates neither the federal nor the state governments shall establish a state religion and prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. It provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change religion and to manifest and propagate religion "in worship, teaching, practice, and observance," provided these rights are consistent with the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality, or health, and protecting the rights of others. The constitution also states it shall be the duty of the state to encourage interfaith marriages and to promote the formation of associations that cut across religious lines and promote "national integration." It prohibits political parties that limit membership on the basis of religion or with names that have a religious connotation.

The constitution provides for state-level courts based on common or customary law systems, which have operated in the region for centuries. It specifically recognizes sharia courts of appeal in any states that require it, with jurisdiction over civil proceedings such as marriage, inheritance, and other family matters, where all the parties are Muslims. Sharia courts hear criminal cases in 12 northern states. State laws on sharia criminal courts vary, but at least one state, Zamfara, requires that criminal cases in which all litigants are Muslim be heard in sharia courts. According to state laws, sharia courts may pass sentences based on the sharia penal code, including *hudood* offenses (serious criminal offenses with punishments prescribed in the Quran) and prescribe punishments, such as caning, amputation, and death by stoning. State laws dictate non-Muslims have the option to try their cases in sharia courts if involved in civil or criminal disputes with Muslims. Common law courts hear the cases of non-Muslims and Muslims (in states where they have the option) who choose not to use sharia courts. Sharia courts do not have the authority to compel participation by non-Muslims. Aggrieved parties can appeal sharia court judgments to three levels of sharia appellate courts. According to the constitution, decisions by the state sharia courts of appeal (the highest level of the sharia courts) theoretically can be appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal and then to the Supreme Court, although none has been.

Kano and Zamfara's state-sanctioned Hisbah Boards regulate Islamic religious affairs and preaching, distribute licenses to imams, and attempt to resolve religious disputes between Muslims in those states. The states of Bauchi, Borno, Katsina, and Yobe maintain state-level Christian and Muslim religious affairs ministries or bureaus with varying mandates and authorities, while many other state governors appoint interfaith special advisers on religious affairs.

Registration of religious groups is required for groups to build places of worship, open bank accounts, receive tax exemptions, or

sign contracts. Religious groups planning to build places of worship must register with the Corporate Affairs Commission as an incorporated trustee, which involves submitting an application form, proof of public notice, a copy of the organization's constitution, a list of trustees, and a fee of 20,000 naira (\$66).

Both federal and state governments have the authority to regulate mandatory religious instruction in public schools. The constitution states schools may not require students to receive religious instruction or to participate in or attend any religious ceremony or observance pertaining to any religion other than their own. State officials and many religious leaders have stated students have the right to request a teacher of their own religious beliefs to provide an alternative to any instruction offered in a religion other than their own. The constitution also says no religious community will be prevented from providing religious instruction to students of that community in any place maintained wholly by that community.

Several states have laws requiring licenses for preachers, places of worship, and religious schools of registered religious groups. A Katsina State law establishes a board with the authority to regulate Islamic schools, preachers, and mosques, including issuing permits, suspending operations, and imprisoning or fining violators. The Katsina law stipulates a punishment of one to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to 500,000 naira (\$1,600) for operating without a license.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Clashes between police and IMN members resulted in the death of at least nine civilians. According to a Kaduna State report, a late 2015 clash between the army and IMN members resulted in at least 348 IMN members and one soldier dead. The government did not file charges against any soldiers after the incident; approximately 200 IMN members were awaiting trial for conspiracy and homicide. Sharia courts in Kano State confirmed the death sentences of an imam and eight others for blasphemy and sentenced a Tijaniyah Sufi Muslim cleric and five others to death after convicting them of blasphemy. Both cases were on appeal. Human rights groups and religious authorities accused the security forces of abuses and religious suppression when dealing with minority religious groups. Some Christian groups reported a lack of protection by government authorities for churches and Christian communities, especially in the central and northern regions. They reported discrimination in acquiring land permits to build churches and in admission to universities in the north. Muslims living in predominantly Christian states reported discrimination by state governments against such practices as women wearing the hijab. There were continued conflicts between displaced ethnic groups, known as settlers, and longstanding residents or indigenes, which the groups accused the federal government of ignoring. The differences between the two groups were frequently religious as well as ethnic and economic. State governments often granted preferential treatment, for example in access to education and jobs, to indigenes over settlers.

On November 14, Nigerian security forces clashed with members of the IMN who were marching from Kano city to Zaria, resulting in an indeterminate number of deaths and injuries. According to the police, nine people died, including members of the police, while the IMN said 100 of its members were killed and 87 detained. Other reports estimated several dozen dead and well over 100 injured as a result of the violence. Members of the Shia group were embarking on their annual symbolic pilgrimage to Zaria, Kaduna State, to mark the end of the 40-day period of remembrance of the death of Imam Hussein. The violence began after an argument between the police and IMN members. The police stated an IMN member took an officer's gun, which resulted in other officers opening fire, while the IMN stated the police opened fire without provocation.

On October 7 the government of Kaduna issued an order declaring the IMN unlawful in Kaduna and stating that any IMN member would be prosecuted. According to the text of the order, Governor Nasir el-Rufai reached the decision in the exercise of his constitutional powers to protect "public safety, public order, public morality... [and] the rights and freedoms of all persons" in

his state. The order cited the report of the state's judicial commission of inquiry el-Rufai appointed to investigate the deadly December 2015 confrontation between the Nigerian Army and the IMN in Zaria, Kaduna. In particular, the order referenced the commission's findings and recommendations that the IMN was not registered and should be "proscribed;" had a history of violence and aggression that culminated in the December 2015 incident; operated like a parallel government in disregard of Nigerian law; continued to hold unauthorized gatherings and processions in public spaces; and constituted "danger to the peace, tranquility, harmonious coexistence and good governance of Kaduna State."

The commission had issued its report on July 15, which concluded at least 348 IMN members and one soldier died during the December 2015 clash, which began with a roadblock by the IMN. The report also found that the army quickly buried hundreds of IMN members in a mass grave following the attacks. The IMN released a list in January of members it said went missing following the violence. The list included more than 700 people. The commission report found the army used "excessive and disproportionate" force, and recommended the military or the federal government attorney general conduct an independent investigation and prosecute anyone found to have acted unlawfully.

Katsina, Kebbi, Kano, and Jigawa States banned religious processions just prior to the annual Ashura processions, performed by Shia Muslims worldwide in remembrance of the death of Imam Hussein. On October 12, mobs and security forces in a number of northern states attacked Shia participating in the processions, killing at least 15 people. Authorities subsequently arrested hundreds of Shia and charged them with disturbing the peace. The Islamic Human Rights Commission said it echoed the IMN's statement that the arrests and charges were "an embarrassment to the nation" and called on authorities to release those detained, among whom were women and children, describing them as "prisoners of conscience."

On December 5, the government of Kaduna State released its White Paper on the Zaria incident of the previous year. The White Paper accepted many of the recommendations of the commission report, including that of proscribing the IMN and investigating and prosecuting army personnel found to have acted unlawfully. The paper also accepted the commission's position that IMN leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky be held responsible for the actions of IMN members during the incident and for any illegal acts committed by IMN members during the preceding 30 years. The paper declared the IMN "an insurgent group" that challenged state authority and that it should be treated as a threat to the government.

IMN leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky and his wife remained in custody without charges at year's end, although a federal High Court in Abuja ruled on December 2 that the federal government must release both within 45 days. More than 200 imprisoned IMN members awaited trial on charges of conspiracy and culpable homicide. At year's end, the government had not arrested or charged any soldiers as a result of the incident. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a semi-independent agency of the federal government, also investigated the incident and recommended the speedy prosecution of IMN members as well as soldiers found culpable of abuses. In its report released on September 21, the NHRC stated the killings by soldiers of IMN members appeared to be wholly unjustified.

In January a Kano State sharia court convicted Tijaniyah Sufi Muslim cleric Abdul Nyass and five others of blasphemy for derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad and sentenced them to death. Four other followers of the cleric were acquitted. All who were sentenced filed appeals. On January 4, a Kano State Upper Sharia Court sentenced cleric Abdulaziz Dauda and nine followers to death for making blasphemous statements against the Prophet Muhammad; the case was on appeal at year's end. Dauda allegedly said on May 15, 2015 that Sheikh Ibrahim Niassa, a 20th century Islamic scholar of the Tijaniyah Sufi order, had a larger following than did the Prophet Muhammad. The statement led to the burning of a sharia court in Kano the following week, as angry youths protested and called for the execution of Dauda. The case was ongoing at year's end.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) said the government rarely investigated cases of violence or other abuses against religious freedom or prosecuted or punished perpetrators. It cited as an example the November 3 release of five Muslim men

suspected of responsibility for the mob attack and killing of a 74-year-old Christian woman in Kano. The five men charged were released in November after the Kano attorney general said his review of the case indicated that there was no evidence against the five accused men. The CAN said this reflected a pattern of impunity throughout the country.

Both Muslim and Christian groups reported a lack of protection by federal, state, and local authorities, especially in central regions, where there were longstanding, violent disputes between Hausa Muslims and Christian ethnic groups. In April the Movement Against Fulani Occupation (MAFO), an NGO, filed a suit against the government with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice for what the NGO said was a failure to protect indigenous Christian groups against attacks by Fulani herdsmen. According to MAFO, more than 1,000 people were killed in three years. Additionally, in November the ECOWAS Court of Justice heard a case filed by the Jama'a Foundation, a Muslim association in southern Kaduna, against the government for alleged failure to protect Muslims in attacks after the 2011 presidential election, when Human Rights Watch reported more than 500 people were killed, mainly Muslims. Additionally, Fulani Muslim herdsmen and Christian farmers complained of a lack of accountability in conflicts over land use. The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder's Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) stated that authorities consistently failed to bring to justice Christian farmers who killed their members and their cattle, while Christian farmers stated that previous cases of attacks against them remained unresolved with either no arrests or arrests without further judicial progress. MACBAN and World Watch Monitor stated the government made no attempt to address key issues, including accountability of the perpetrators for crimes committed, prosecution of perpetrators, or security.

A pending bill in Kaduna State would require all preachers to obtain preaching licenses or risk fines and/or imprisonment for up to two years. Deputy Governor of Kaduna State Barnabas Bala said the bill was proposed to protect the state from religious extremism and hate speech. The bill would also restrict playing religious recordings at certain times and places as well as prohibit "abusive" religious speech, which it did not define further. The draft bill generated widespread opposition from both Muslim and Christian groups, who cited fears that such steps would lead to broader government restrictions on religious organizations and general religious activity.

Muslim groups said public school uniforms, particularly in the south, were too revealing and thus discriminated against their standards. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), in Osun and Lagos States, public school authorities prevented girls from wearing the hijab at school as part of their uniform. On June 3, the Osun State High Court ruled in favor of the Muslim community's suit against the state government, which banned the hijab in 2013. The ruling decreed female students could wear the hijab in government primary and secondary schools. On July 21, a court of appeals in Lagos State lifted a 2013 ban on wearing the hijab in government schools. The judges said the ban violated the religious rights of Muslim girls.

Christian groups reported authorities in northern states continued to deny building permits to minority religious communities for the construction of new places of worship, expansion, and renovation of existing facilities, or reconstruction of buildings that had been demolished. The Christian Association of Nigeria reported that local community leaders, traditional rulers, and government officials in predominantly Muslim northern states used regulations on zoning and title registrations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches. Church leaders said they were able to evade such restrictions by purchasing and developing land in the name of an individual member of their congregation or simply by building churches without permits, but this practice left them in a tenuous legal position.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports by Christian groups of non-Muslims in northern states appearing in sharia courts against their will. According to these groups, most Christians in northern states had learned that they had the right to refuse to appear in a sharia court and exercised that right if they did not wish to use such courts.

State governments in Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, and Zamfara funded sharia law enforcement groups called the Hisbah, which Christian groups said enforced sharia inconsistently and sporadically, sometimes targeting Christians or

residents of other states. While residents in areas traditionally set aside for Christians reportedly felt that Hisbah groups were generally more lenient in those areas, visitors or residents of other states and homes and businesses in predominantly Christian neighborhoods were sometimes raided as well. The Kano State Hisbah continued to arrest residents for alcohol consumption, begging, prostitution, and other purported violations of sharia. According to the NGO Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a 15-year-old Christian girl was returned to her family in March after an investigation by the Sokoto State government Human Rights Commission. Two neighbors aided by the Hisbah in Sokoto State reportedly abducted the girl in August 2015 and took her to Bauchi State, where she was forced to convert to Islam and marry. Police arrested three people in connection with the abduction.

Christian and Muslim groups reported individual administrators of government-run universities and technical schools in several states refused to admit them or delayed the issuance of their degrees and licenses because of their religion or ethnicity. For example, in Borno State, Christians stated that they had been marginalized due to their faith and that Kanuri Muslims had been given preferential treatment for government jobs and admission to higher education. Mail & Guardian Africa, an African news website, reported that in Plateau State, Hausa Muslims stated they had been marginalized while predominantly Christian ethnic groups received preferential treatment. According to Christian and Muslim groups and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, the issue was part of the country's settler-indigene conflict, whereby state governments granted benefits to ethnic groups considered to be indigenous to a particular state and distinguished them from ethnic groups considered to be settlers, even if their families had lived in the state for generations. In certain states, especially in the Middle Belt, the divide was religious as well as ethnic and economic, between Christian indigenes and Muslim settlers.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

The U.S.-designated terrorist organization Boko Haram split into two factions during the year, one pledging allegiance to ISIS and calling itself the Islamic State of West Africa (ISIS-WA), headed by Abu Musab al Barnawi, and another headed by Abubakr Shekau and retaining the traditional Boko Haram name, the Jama'atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da'awati wal-Jihad (JASDJ). Most residents referred to both groups collectively as Boko Haram.

Boko Haram continued to commit acts of mass violence in its stated quest to impose its religious and political beliefs in the northeast. Boko Haram perpetrated numerous attacks, including mass killings, often directly targeting civilians. According to estimates from the NGO Nigeria Watch, 2,900 people, including Boko Haram members, died as a result of the group's activities during the year, compared with a press estimate of 4,780 killed in 2015. On January 30, Boko Haram raided the village of Dalori, three miles outside of Borno State capital Maiduguri, killing 122 people and abducting a number of children. In some cases, the group employed women and children as suicide bombers, such as in the October 29 suicide attack in Maiduguri that killed nine.

Boko Haram killed two Christians, burned houses, and vandalized shops in incidents in Kuburumbula and Boftari, Borno State in September. The group also burned seven houses and vandalized shops. Boko Haram tied up and killed one of the men in front of his family. On September 18, Boko Haram shot and killed eight Christians as they left a Sunday church service in Kwamjilari village in Borno State.

Most captives of past Boko Haram kidnappings of women and girls for purposes of forced marriage or sexual exploitation remained unaccounted for. In August Boko Haram released a video showing at least 50 of the 200 girls kidnapped from a secondary school in Chibok, Borno State in 2014; the group demanded the release of captured Boko Haram fighters in exchange for the kidnapped girls, some of whom it said had been killed in airstrikes and 40 of whom had been married. *The New York Times* reported in October that the government secured the release of 21 of the girls and quoted a government official who denied Boko

Haram fighters were released in exchange for the girls.

Tens of thousands of refugees remained in neighboring countries after having fled the violence in the northeast, and more than 1.7 million people remained internally displaced.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were incidents of killings and other religiously motivated violence, including between Christian farmers and Fulani Muslim herdsman. Churches and mosques hired private security or took additional security measures in response to attacks and bombings. Religious leaders generally spoke out against violence and urged their followers to live peaceably. Muslim and Christian leaders reported a lack of trust between Muslims and Christians.

Between February 22 and 29, Fulani Muslim herdsman attacked the predominantly Christian Agatu community in Benue, killing over 300 people and burning churches and mosques in the villages. The Fulani said the attacks were retaliation for the killing of 10,000 of their cattle. There were no arrests. After negotiations between the Agatu and Fulani leaders in March, the Fulani left the area.

In October media reported gunmen believed to be Fulani herdsman killed 40 people in Godogodo, Kaduna State. In retaliation, media reported Christians stopped two buses traveling from Plateau State to Kaduna State, removed the Fulani herdsman passengers, and killed 14 of them, burning the bodies. According to MACBAN, the attacks in Godogodo began with a clash between two Fulani herdsman and a Christian farmer. MACBAN said the herdsman's cattle destroyed the farmer's crops, which the herdsman said were on a cattle-grazing route. After the fight, the farmer was hospitalized after receiving a nonfatal machete blow to the head. Upon hearing the news, local Christian youth attacked the Fulani settlement and burned several homes. The leader of the Fulani settlement, on his way to request assistance from local authorities, was killed and his body burned.

In a raid that lasted several hours on November 15, suspected armed Fulani herdsman killed 42 persons and burned down 49 houses in several villages in Kaura, Kaduna State. The attack was purportedly in response to the killing of 19 head of cattle a few weeks earlier. The Southern Kaduna People's Union reported an attack by Fulani herdsman just outside of Kafanchan, Kaduna on December 24 and 25, resulting in 16 deaths. The herdsman carried out the attack during a 24-hour curfew imposed by the Kaduna State Government after Christians took to the streets to protest the lack of security in the region. The police and army significantly increased their presence in the region in response to the attacks.

NGOs cited a number of contributing factors for the increase of clashes between Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers, namely the shrinking of formerly shared resources caused by desertification and soil erosion, population growth, and banditry and violence in the north that caused herders to move further south into lands predominantly populated by Christians. Because of the close links among religion, ethnicity, and political and economic interests, it was difficult to categorize many of these incidents as based solely on religious identity.

There were several incidents of mob violence related to allegations of blasphemy. On May 29, a mob in Pandogari, Niger State killed a Christian man for allegedly posting blasphemous statements against Islam on a social media network. After the incident, riots broke out in the area, resulting in three other deaths, a number of injuries, and the destruction of a church. The military and police intervened to reestablish order and arrested 32 individuals. On June 2, assailants killed a Christian vendor originally from southeast Nigeria in Kofar Wambai Market in Kano City after she attempted to prevent a Muslim from performing *Wudu*, ritual cleansing before prayer, in front of her shop. The killing was condemned by President Buhari, the country's senate, the chairman of the CAN, and the Sultan of Sokoto. Five individuals were arrested, but, on November 3, a magistrate court dismissed the case and released them after State Attorney General Haruna Falali announced the state had no case. He declared the men innocent and instructed the court to release them.

On August 22, a group of Muslim students at Abdu Gusau Polytechnic in Zamfara State reportedly burned down the home of a Muslim student, killing eight Muslims trapped inside. The group accused the Muslim student of assisting a Christian student whom the group had beaten for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The NGO International Christian Concern reported that the Christian student was hospitalized after his beating and that the group of Muslim students also vandalized various Christian establishments on campus and several churches. There were no reports of arrests.

In Benue State, according to the NGO Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), unknown assailants abducted three Catholic clergymen and held them for ransom. One of the priests, Father John Adeyi, was found dead in June behind the Otukpa secretariat building after his kidnapping in April. CSW stated he might have died because he could not access his asthma medication. His death came after his family paid 2 million naira (\$6,600) for his release. CSW reported the remains of another priest, the Reverend Iliya Anto, were found in Kaduna State, nine days after he and the two other clergymen had been abducted. In November an Islamic cleric was kidnapped in Kaduna and released after two days. It was not known whether the requested 60 million naira (\$198,000) ransom was paid. Kidnapping for ransom was common throughout the country, and there was no evidence the religion of the victims was a factor in these cases.

On June 7, Muslim youths stabbed a Christian man in Kaduna for eating during Ramadan. The man survived. There were no reported arrests.

Many religious leaders publicly supported tolerance and interfaith methods of conflict resolution. For example, on August 19, Muslim and Christian religious leaders inaugurated the International Center for Interfaith Peace and Harmony in Kaduna. The center was to serve as an interfaith platform to discuss and advocate for policies that would promote peace between the two faiths.

Muslim leaders regularly publicly condemned the activities of Boko Haram as un-Islamic and disassociated themselves from the ideology and actions of the group. According to local press, Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs Sa'ad Abubakar III warned against violence and forced conversion to Islam, stating, "We do not force anybody to join Islam. Those who do not want to come as Muslims are free to stay with us and continue working with us to make this country a much better place."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy staff promoted religious freedom and tolerance in discussions throughout the year with government officials, such as the national security advisor, chief of army staff, and minister of foreign relations. After the November clashes in Kano State between security forces and the IMN in which an indeterminate number of IMN members died, a senior embassy official met with the governor of Kaduna and the inspector general of police to encourage restraint by security forces. Embassy representatives met with civil society and religious leaders, such as the Sultan of Sokoto, the president of CAN, and the Archbishop of Abuja, to understand their concerns and to stress the importance of interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and promoting religious freedom. The embassy also cosponsored anticorruption workshops in Lagos and Kano for Muslim and Christian religious leaders, where it highlighted the importance of working across faiths and respecting the freedom of religion in order to effectively fight corruption.

During his August 23-24 visit, the U.S. Secretary of State met with the Sultan of Sokoto and Anglican Bishop Augustine Omole, as well as other Christian and Muslim leaders, to encourage interfaith dialogue to address shared challenges and efforts to counter violent extremism. On October 17-19, the U.S. Special Representative to Muslim Communities visited Abuja and Kano and gave press interviews across multiple platforms to highlight the importance of religious freedom in religiously diverse democracies like Nigeria.

In a May visit to Abuja for a regional security summit, the Deputy Secretary of State met with Nigerian political leaders to discuss human rights concerns, and reiterated the United States' commitment to support the fight against Boko Haram and called for a

sustained and comprehensive approach to address its root causes.

In an April visit, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN and the Ambassador met with President Buhari and with political, humanitarian, and religious leaders to discuss efforts to combat Boko Haram and deal with the impact of the group's abuses, reaffirming U.S. support for those efforts. In meetings with Christian and Muslim religious leaders, they discussed ways of rebuilding and strengthening trust between the two religious groups and of combating radicalization and extremism.

In a visit to Abuja and Jos in February, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom engaged a wide spectrum of religious leaders, identifying issues for embassy advocacy and reiterating U.S. government support for religious freedom. He reiterated to government officials the importance of holding perpetrators of violence responsible, addressing security concerns of religious communities, and eliminating religiously motivated discrimination and abuses. In Plateau State, the Ambassador advocated for the importance of religious freedom and the need for officials to address the drivers of religious conflict in the state. He also met with community leaders and NGOs working on conflict resolution to discuss the successes in alleviating tensions between different ethnic and religious groups.

The U.S. Consul General in Lagos continued to discuss religious tolerance and interfaith relationship building with religious leaders from all faiths in the country. The consulate general also cosponsored an event to reinforce countering violent extremism messaging from academic, religious, and humanitarian perspectives.

Rwanda

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws prohibit religious discrimination and provide for freedom of religion and worship. In January the Rwanda National Police (RNP) shot and killed an imam while in custody. RNP officers shot and killed three other Muslim community members in August in Bugarama. The latter incident came two days after another Muslim was shot and killed by the RNP in Kigali. In each case, the government issued statements indicating the individuals were suspected of having links to foreign terrorist organizations. Muslim community members expressed concern about the killings and about the arrests of more than 20 members of the Muslim community. The High Council of Muslims introduced a ban on wearing the *niqab*, which was endorsed by the RNP as a measure to bolster security and combat terrorism. Compulsory service in night patrols and reciting the pledge of allegiance to the nation while holding the national flag during certain civil ceremonies was required of all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses, despite their religious objections. Thirty-six Jehovah's Witnesses were dismissed for their refusal to touch the national flag while taking the oath required of civil servants. Seventh-day Adventist students attending Catholic-affiliated public schools regularly faced the risk of suspension and expulsion for missing classes scheduled on their Sabbath.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported Catholic schools required all students to attend Mass regardless of personal faith. Christian leaders reported Islamic schools required all female students to wear headscarves in class as well as outside schools until they reached their homes. Religious leaders reported numerous faith-based groups and associations contributed to greater understanding and tolerance by participating in interfaith meetings and collaborating on community development projects.

Embassy representatives engaged the government and religious leaders on religious freedom and hosted interfaith events, including an iftar, where religious freedom and tolerance were among the key messages.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2012 census, the population is 44 percent Roman Catholic, 11.9 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 37.9 percent other Protestant denominations, 2 percent Muslim, and 0.7 percent Jehovah's Witnesses. Several other small religious groups, together constituting less than 1 percent of the population, include animists, Bahais, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and a small Jewish community consisting entirely of foreigners. Approximately 2.5 percent of the population holds no religious beliefs. The Head Office of the Rwanda Muslim Community (RMC) stated Muslims could constitute as much as 10 percent of the population. The majority of Muslims are Sunni, with a small number of Shia (200-300), according to the RMC. While generally there are no concentrations of religious groups in certain geographic areas, residents of the Nyamirambo district of Kigali, known as "the Muslim Quarter," are mainly Muslim. There is no significant correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic status.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship and its public manifestation even when the government declares a state of emergency. Exercising these rights may be subject to limitations in order to ensure respect of others' rights and good morals, public order, and social welfare. The constitution bars political parties based on religious affiliation. The penal code stipulates religious discrimination is punishable by five to seven years in prison and fines of 100,000 to 1 million Rwandan francs (\$123-\$1,227).

Under the law governing religious groups, all groups "whose members share the same beliefs, cult, and practice" must register with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) to acquire legal status. According to the law, a faith-based organization (FBO) must submit the following in order to register: an application letter addressed to the chief executive of the RGB; authenticated statutes governing its organization, including provisions stipulating its activities; general information including the location of its head office and the names of its legal representative, his/her deputy, their duties, full address, curricula vitae, and criminal records; a document certifying the legal representative and his/her deputy were appointed in accordance with its statutes; a brief statement describing its major doctrines; the minutes of the group's general assembly which approved the statutes of the organization; an action plan for the fiscal year; and an endorsement letter issued by the district mayor. No FBO is allowed to operate without an RGB-issued registration.

The law covering religious groups does not address nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) associated with religious groups. Domestic NGOs associated with religious groups are required to register with the RGB, but under a different law governing NGOs. The law details a multistep NGO registration process, and requires annual financial and activity reports and action plans.

The government grants legal recognition only to civil marriages.

New public servants are required by law to take an oath of loyalty "in the name of God almighty" and touch the flag while reciting the oath. The law does not make accommodations for religious minorities whose faith does not permit them to comply with this requirement.

The law establishes fines of 20,000 to 1 million Rwandan francs (\$25-\$1,227) and imprisonment from eight days to five years for anyone who hinders the free practice of religion; publicly humiliates rites, symbols, or objects of religion; or insults, threatens, or physically assaults a religious leader.

The law regulates public meetings, including assemblies for religious reasons, that may disturb public order or are deemed politically sensitive, and establishes fines of 100,000 to 5 million Rwandan francs (\$123-\$6,135) and imprisonment of eight days to three years for unauthorized public meetings. Governing authorities are required to respond within 15 days to requests by FBOs to hold special meetings in public. The specific governing authority is the local, regional, or national official depending on where the meeting takes place. There are no provisions on approval for routine meetings under the law.

For nighttime meetings, including religious meetings, local authorities often require advance notification, particularly for ceremonies involving amplified music and boisterous celebrations. Laws prohibit excessive noise that disrupt neighborhoods and undermine property values, and impose fines for violations ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 Rwandan francs (\$12-\$123). Nighttime noise disturbances may be punished by imprisonment of eight days to two months and/or a fine of 50,000 to 1 million Rwandan francs (\$61-\$1,227). Religious organizations are required to conform to laws protecting public security, public health, good morals, and human rights.

Unregistered religious groups may congregate after informing local authorities and can be granted a temporary registration certificate while the legal application process, which might last well over a year, remains ongoing.

All students in public primary school and the first three years of secondary education must take a religion class that discusses various religions. The curriculum is established by the Ministry of Education. The law does not specify either opt-out provisions or penalties for not taking part in the class. The law allows parents to enroll their children in private religious schools.

The government subsidizes some schools affiliated with different religions. A presidential order guarantees students attending any government-subsidized school the right to worship according to their beliefs during the school day, as long as their religious groups are registered in the country and the students' worship practices do not interfere with learning and teaching activities. The order does not stipulate any procedure for arranging special accommodations.

The law prohibits religious groups from engaging in activities designed to achieve political power, defined as supporting political organizations or candidates for public office.

Every foreign missionary must have a temporary resident permit and a foreign identity card. Specific requirements to obtain the permit (valid for two years and renewable) include a signed curriculum vitae, an original police clearance from the country of residence, an authorization letter from the parent organization, and a fee of 100,000 Rwandan francs (\$123).

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Government Practices

On January 23, the Rwanda National Police (RNP) shot and killed an imam while in custody. The RNP reported the imam was trying to escape while in transit from his residence to the Kanombe police station. RNP officers shot and killed three other Muslim community members on August 19 in Bugarama. The RNP reported the three were trying to escape after resisting arrest. The latter incident came two days after another Muslim was shot and killed by the RNP in Kigali. In all three cases, the RNP issued statements indicating the individuals were suspected of having links to foreign terrorist organizations. Muslim community members expressed concern about police killings of members of the Muslim community, which they said took place under questionable circumstances. Media sources reported more than 20 other Muslims were arrested and accused of seeking to establish ties with international jihadist groups.

In July the RNP issued a statement in support of the Rwanda High Council of Muslims' (HCM) ban on women wearing the *niqab*,

which the HCM instituted earlier in July. The RNP statement said it was a measure to bolster security and combat terrorism. The HCM oversees Muslim affairs, but does not have the authority to make laws. According to media sources, the RMC campaigned for the ban through social media and posters at various mosques warning individuals against wearing the *niqab*.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report local officials' retaliation against members who refused to sing the national anthem in school or participate in community night patrols and government-sponsored "solidarity" civil and military training. The RNP arrested 10 Jehovah's Witnesses during the year for refusing on religious grounds to participate in community night patrols that required carrying batons and performing work similar to that of the police. Police held the detainees for periods ranging from two to nine days before releasing them without charge. More than 100 Jehovah's Witnesses students were expelled for their refusal to sing the national anthem in school. The country did not address the concerns of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) about restrictions placed on freedom of conscience and religion of Jehovah's Witnesses related to ICCPR articles on nondiscrimination, freedom of religion, and rights of minorities in its response to the UNHRC Universal Periodic Review.

Unregistered religious groups received a significant degree of government scrutiny until they registered as an FBO under the law. Small religious congregations sometimes temporarily affiliated with larger registered organizations in order to operate.

Courts ruled in the cases of several Jehovah's Witnesses who were dismissed from government agencies since 2011 for refusing to touch the national flag while taking the public servant's oath. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 36 members losing employment for refusing to touch the national flag while taking the oath. Of the 23 Jehovah's Witnesses who took their cases to court on the grounds of alleged violations of their religious beliefs and illegal dismissal, five plaintiffs lost their cases in the High Court, eight plaintiffs lost their cases in the Supreme Court, one won the case, and nine cases were still pending in courts at year's end. Jehovah's Witnesses leadership reported difficulties in securing appointments with authorities to discuss a range of legal requirements imposing certain limitations on their religious practices and beliefs.

Both Christian and Muslim places of worship were affected by noise ordinance restrictions and were required to decrease the volume on their sound equipment.

Government officials presiding over wedding ceremonies generally required couples to take a pledge "in the name of God Almighty" while touching the national flag, a legal requirement. Jehovah's Witnesses stated this made it difficult to marry legally, since few officials were willing to perform the ceremony without the flag oath and Jehovah's Witnesses objected to the practice on religious grounds. For some Jehovah's Witnesses, placing their hands on a Bible on top of the flag was an acceptable alternative. Jehovah's Witnesses were not able to obtain a waiver and reported difficulties in getting an appointment with relevant authorities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In December the Rwanda Football Federation (FERWAF) banned the practice of witchcraft during soccer games. Players found guilty of practicing witchcraft faced a three-match ban and a fine of 100,000 Rwandan Franc (\$123), although there were no cases of the penalty being enforced at year's end. According to the FERWAF vice president, FERWAF decided to enact the new ban because of "the violence between players because of allegations that one team is using [witchcraft]."

Seventh-day Adventist students attending Catholic-affiliated government-subsidized schools regularly faced the risk of suspension and expulsion for missing classes scheduled on their Saturday Sabbath. According to Church leaders, this ongoing issue for Seventh-day Adventist students was generally resolved at the school district level after a conference between parent associations and school officials. Seventh-day Adventists also ran their own schools at all levels across the country to avoid continued problems with Catholic-affiliated schools.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported Catholic schools, both government-subsidized and private, required all students to attend Mass regardless of their personal faith. Christian leaders reported Muslim schools required all female students to wear headscarves in class as well as outside schools until they reached their homes.

Religious leaders, particularly the Grand Mufti of Rwanda, reported numerous religious groups and associations contributed to greater religious understanding and tolerance by participating in interfaith meetings and collaborating on community development projects, such as providing assistance to HIV/AIDS patients and supporting government development initiatives. Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly do not attend interfaith meetings.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives engaged with government officials, including staff responsible for FBO and NGO registration, and urged the government to simplify the process and increase transparency. In these meetings, the government expressed a commitment to religious freedom and tolerance.

The U.S. embassy hosted interfaith discussions focused on religious diversity and included members of different religious groups in numerous public outreach programs it conducted in Kigali and throughout the country. In June the U.S. Ambassador hosted an interfaith iftar, which was attended by more than 60 guests, including the Grand Mufti of Rwanda, the secretary general of the Catholic Bishops Conference, the head of the Evangelical Restoration Church, a representative from the Pentecostal Church, the Anglican deputy to the archbishop, as well as 12 RMC members. In her remarks, the Ambassador focused on the opportunity Ramadan presented for sparking interfaith dialogue.

The embassy underscored the value of religious diversity and inclusion at key community events, including during the genocide commemoration, which featured interfaith prayers, and at the embassy's Independence Day celebration.

Sao Tome and Principe

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and equality for all, irrespective of religious belief. It grants religious groups autonomy and the right to teach their religion. Religious groups must register with the government.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy staff based in Gabon, in periodic visits to the country, met with key government officials and religious leaders to encourage continued respect for religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 198,000 (July 2016 estimate). The Roman Catholic bishop's office estimates more than 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, approximately 12 percent Protestant, and less than 2 percent Muslim. Protestant groups include Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and evangelical Protestant groups, including the Evangelic Assembly of Christ, the Universal Church of Christ, and the Thokoist Church. The number of Muslims has increased over the past 10 years due to an influx of migrants from Nigeria, Cameroon, and other African countries. Some Christians and Muslims also adhere to aspects of

indigenous beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. It provides for equality of rights and obligations irrespective of religious belief or practice and for freedom of religious groups to teach their faith and to organize themselves and their worship activities. According to the constitution, these rights are to be interpreted in harmony with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and may only be restricted in cases envisaged in the constitution and or suspended during a state of emergency or siege declared according to the terms of the constitution and the law.

Religious groups must register with the government. If a religious group does not register, the group is subject to fines and possible expulsion if it is a foreign religious group. To register, a group must send a letter requesting authorization to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ). Once the group obtains authorization, it must submit the following documents to a notary public: the MOJ's approval letter; the group's statutes; the minutes or report from a meeting attended by representatives of the group and signed by its president and secretary; copies of the national identity cards of those who attended this meeting; a list of board members; and a certificate from the registrar's office attesting that no existing organization has the same name. After a payment of 320,000 dobras (\$13.60) for notarial fees, an announcement is published in the government gazette and the group may then operate fully as a registered group without restrictions. Once registered, a religious group does not need to register again. Registered religious groups receive the same benefits, such as tax exemptions, as registered nonprofit organizations.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

There were no reports of significant government actions affecting religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

There is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the country. U.S. embassy staff in Gabon engaged with government officials to encourage continued respect for religious freedom. U.S. embassy officials met with religious leaders, including the Roman Catholic bishop, evangelical religious leaders, and an imam, to discuss the involvement of religious groups in social issues affecting their communities.

Senegal

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the free practice of religious beliefs and self-governance by religious groups without government interference. The government requires registration of religious and other groups, and provides funding for Islamic and Christian schools and pilgrimages. In June a court in Kolda convicted an Islamic preacher of glorifying terrorism, incitement to civil disobedience, and religious intolerance, and sentenced him to one year in jail; following an appeal, his sentence was increased in October to 30 months. In October a French national was arrested for “insulting” Islam and was held in Dakar’s Rebeuss Prison. In October the Court of Dakar delivered a suspended six-month sentence to Imam Cheikh Mbacke Sakho for insulting the country’s Mouride brotherhood. On July 28, President Macky Sall invited Islamic scholars to deliver a “doctrinal response” to those who used religion to justify their acts of terrorism.

A coalition of children’s rights NGOs focused attention on the abuse of children at some Quranic schools, including through forced begging, and urged the government to address the problem through more effective regulation and prosecution of offending teachers. The country’s authorities initiated a campaign to implement a 2005 law that forbids forced child begging.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials promoted religious pluralism and tolerance through engagement with the country’s largest Sufi brotherhoods, the newly-arrived Papal Nuncio in Dakar, and an influential imam of a major mosque who honored the victims of the Orlando nightclub shooting during an iftar hosted by the Ambassador in Thies.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.9 million (July 2015 estimate). According to government statistics from 2014, 96.1 percent of the population is Muslim. Most Muslims are Sunni and belong to one of several Sufi brotherhoods, each of which incorporates unique practices, while a small number of Muslims are Shia (5,000 individuals, according to one unofficial 2011 estimate). Approximately 3.8 percent of the population is Christian. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and groups combining Christian and indigenous beliefs. The remaining 0.1 percent exclusively adheres to indigenous religions or professes no religion.

The Christian minority is located in towns in the west and south. Members of indigenous religious groups live mainly in the east and south.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided public order is maintained, as well as self-governance by religious groups free from state interference. The constitution prohibits political parties from identifying with a specific religion.

Muslims may choose either the civil family code or sharia to adjudicate family conflicts, such as marriage and inheritance disputes. Civil court judges preside over civil and customary law cases, but religious leaders informally settle many disputes among Muslims, particularly in rural areas.

By law all faith-based organizations, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) representing religious groups, must register with the interior ministry to acquire legal status as an association. To register, organizations must provide documentation showing they have been in existence for at least two years as an association. Organizations must also provide a mission statement, bylaws, a list of goals, objectives, and activities or projects implemented, and proof of previous and future funding. They must also pass a background check. Registration enables a group to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, receive financial contributions from private sources, and receive applicable tax exemptions. There is no formal penalty for failure to register other than ineligibility to receive these benefits. Registered religious groups and nonprofit organizations are exempt from many forms of taxation.

The law requires associations, including religious organizations and NGOs affiliated with them, to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Development in order to operate. This second registration requirement allows the government to monitor organizations operating in the field of social development and identify any interventions these organizations implement. Foreign NGOs must obtain authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

By law, religious education can be proposed in public and private schools and parents have the option to enroll their children in the program.

The country is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In October a French national was arrested in Dakar for “insulting” Islam and held in Dakar’s Rebeuss Prison. The accused reportedly threatened to kill his employer and disparaged Islam following a dispute. The employer filed a complaint, leading to the arrest for making death threats, defamation, and blasphemy. Following his arrest, the accused reportedly admitted to police that he maligned Islam, the Quran, and the Prophet Muhammad.

In June a court in Kolda convicted Islamic preacher Ibrahima Seye of glorifying terrorism, incitement to civil disobedience and religious intolerance, and sentenced him to one year in jail. Seye had praised jihad and referred to President Sall as an “infidel.” Some imams protested Seye’s arrest, but others accused him of making “misleading” sermons. The prosecutor stated his sentence was too light and filed an appeal. In October the Dakar Court of Appeals increased Seye’s sentence to 30 months (24 without parole).

In October the Court of Dakar delivered a suspended six-month sentence to Imam Cheikh Mbacke Sakho for insulting the country’s Mouride brotherhood, a Sufi order. In an online video from September, Sakho accused the Mouride leadership of making a “business” out of religion and “tricking” their followers, arguing they were not following the example of Mouride founder Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. A lawyer representing the plaintiffs called the court’s decision “calamitous,” arguing the punishment should have been more severe and announcing they would appeal the sentence.

During a speech in July, President Sall invited Islamic scholars to deliver a “doctrinal response” (one based on the Quran and Islamic doctrine) to those who would use religion to justify acts of terrorism. Some scholars subsequently echoed his remarks, in particular the government-employed imam of Dakar’s Grand Mosque. During the United Nations General Assembly session in September, the president urged the international community not to blame Islam or Muslims for acts of terrorism: “We will not allow the crazed acts of a minority without faith or law to serve as a pretext to stigmatize more than a billion Muslims and their religion.” These remarks were echoed by some of Sall’s supporters.

The government provided direct financial and material assistance to religious groups, primarily to maintain or rehabilitate places of

worship or to underwrite special events. There was no formal procedure for applying for assistance. All religious groups had access to these funds and often competed on an ad hoc basis to obtain them. President Sall occasionally visited beneficiaries of these funds. In October he visited mosques the government was rehabilitating in Kaolack and Tambacounda.

The government encouraged and assisted Muslim participation in the Hajj, providing imams with hundreds of free airplane tickets for the pilgrimage for distribution among citizens. Of the 10,500 Senegalese participants in the Hajj, 1,500 were given assistance by the government while the rest traveled on their own via tour operators. The government provided assistance for an annual Roman Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican, the Palestinian territories, and Israel. The Catholic Church reported the government provided 368 million CFA francs (\$589,000) for 550 Catholic pilgrims who traveled to the Vatican in August and September, an increase from 358 million CFA francs (\$573,000) for 338 pilgrims in 2015.

The government allowed up to four hours of voluntary religious education per week in public and private elementary schools. Parents could choose either a Christian or Muslim curriculum. Students had the option to opt out of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education reported slightly more than a million students participated in religious education through the public elementary school system.

The Ministry of Education provided partial funding to schools operated by religious groups that met national education standards. Established Christian schools with strong academic reputations received the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools were Muslim. The government also funded a number of Islamic schools which enrolled approximately 60,000 students.

The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Development monitored the country's associations, including religious groups and NGOs affiliated with them, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitored foreign-based NGOs, including those affiliated with religious groups, to ensure they were operating within the terms of their registration. The ministries required the submission of an annual report, including a financial report, in an effort to track potential funding of terrorist groups. There were no reports that any organization has had its registration revoked for operating outside the terms of its registration.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

A coalition of children's rights NGOs highlighted abuses of students at some traditional Islamic religious schools known as *daaras*, where young children study the Quran and sometimes live. Some *daaras* reportedly forced the children to beg and local media and NGOs documented physical and sexual abuse of some *daara* students. The NGO coalition urged the government to implement more effective regulation of Quranic schools and to prosecute teachers who commit serious violations against children. In July authorities initiated a campaign to implement a 2005 law that forbids forced child begging.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The ambassador and other embassy officials met with government officials in Dakar and with local authorities in Saint Louis to discuss conditions faced by *daara* students as well as the government's campaign against forced child begging. The ambassador and U.S. officials engaged with religious leaders, including leaders of the main Islamic brotherhoods, religious groups, government, and civil society, to promote and help facilitate freedom of religion and societal respect for religious freedom. The ambassador met with a leader from one of the country's largest Sufi brotherhoods, and discussed efforts to promote religious tolerance. The ambassador also met with the newly arrived papal nuncio in Dakar to discuss religious tolerance and the treatment of the country's Catholic minority.

During Ramadan, the ambassador hosted an iftar in Thies during which he delivered remarks highlighting the importance of religious

and ethnic diversity and harmony. During the event, the imam of a major mosque in the region honored the victims of the Orlando nightclub shooting, called for accepting diversity, and condemned religious-based violence. The event and the imam's remarks were favorably covered in print media.

The ambassador hosted a discussion and dinner at a shelter for street children in the northern city of Saint Louis on community-based methods to protect vulnerable children. During the event, the city's head imam as well as the archbishop of Saint Louis spoke about the need for the community to work together across religious lines to protect street children.

Seychelles

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds as well as laws establishing any religion. It provides for freedom of religion, including the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religion. The government bars religious groups from owning radio or television stations, however, it continued to grant larger religious groups programming time on state radio, subject in most cases to advance review and approval. Smaller religious groups did not have access to dedicated broadcast time. Christian religious leaders criticized the government's decision to decriminalize sodomy on the grounds that it violated Catholic beliefs. Although the constitution prohibits compulsory religious education, non-Catholic students in public schools providing Catholic instruction did not have access to alternative activities during those classes.

An interfaith grouping, the Seychelles Interfaith Council (SIFCO), commented publicly on national issues including the decriminalization of sodomy, drugs, and HIV/AIDS. Ruling party supporters criticized the Anglican bishop when he said there were a number of irregularities in the second round of the Presidential elections.

The U.S. embassy in Mauritius monitored religious freedom through regular engagement with representatives of different religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 93,000 (July 2016 estimate). Approximately 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include Anglicans (6 percent), Hindus (2.4 percent), and Muslims (1.6 percent). Smaller religious groups include Bahais and Christian groups such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds, except "as necessary in a democratic society," as well as laws making provisions for the establishment of any religion or imposing any religious observance. It provides for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, including the right of individuals to change religion or belief and to manifest and propagate their religion in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, alone or in community with others, in public or private. These rights may be subject

to limitations to protect public order, safety, morality, or health, the rights of others, or other reasons listed in the constitution. The constitution stipulates individuals shall not be required to take a religious oath counter to their religious beliefs or profess any religion as a prerequisite for public office.

The law requires registration for all religious groups either as corporations or associations. To apply through the Registrar of Associations, a group must submit its name, location, rules, and list of assets; the name, occupation, and addresses of officers and at least seven members; and the resolution appointing its officers. A minimum of seven members is required to register an association. To receive tax privileges, notably tax exemptions on the importation of goods for the organization, religious groups must also register with the finance ministry. The government recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Islam, and the Bahai local spiritual assembly through individual acts of incorporation.

Although no penalties are prescribed for unregistered groups, only those registered as corporate bodies or associations have legal status and the right, for example, to petition the government for broadcast time for religious programming or provide spiritual counsel in prisons.

The constitution prohibits compulsory religious education or participation in religious ceremonies in state schools, but permits religious groups to provide religious instruction. Religious instruction is provided by the Catholic and Anglican churches and offered during school hours. There are no faith-based schools.

The law prohibits religious groups from obtaining radio or television licenses. The government provides broadcast time to religious groups on the national radio broadcasting service. Access is granted based on the size of each group's membership. Religious groups may publish newspapers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Religious groups with fewer assets continued to opt out of recognition as corporate bodies and continued to be registered as associations with the Registrar of Associations.

In May Christian religious leaders criticized the government's decision to decriminalize sodomy and stated "the proposed bill went against beliefs in the overwhelmingly Catholic country."

The government continued to prohibit live broadcasts of all religious programming, with the exception of radio broadcasts, lasting up to 90 minutes each, of Catholic masses and Anglican worship services on alternate Sundays. The government-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation continued to review and approve all other religious programming to ensure hate speech was not broadcast. There were no incidents reported. Other religious programming consisted of 15-minute, prerecorded prayer broadcasts, permitted to Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, and Anglican groups every two weeks. Smaller religious groups continued to protest that the government did not grant them their own dedicated radio broadcast time.

Most state schools continued to operate on land leased by the Catholic Church. Catholic instruction was part of the curriculum, although not compulsory. Non-Catholic students reportedly were often relegated to the back of the classroom during religious instruction and were not offered any alternative activities.

The government continued to offer financial assistance to religious groups from the state budget in the form of grants for repairs of places of worship. All religious groups could apply for grants.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The SIFCO, composed of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Bahais, and other religious groups present in the country, continued its presence at national official events. For example, the SIFCO provided interfaith prayers or blessings at the National Day event celebrating Seychelles independence. The SIFCO commented publicly on national issues, including the decriminalization of sodomy, drugs, HIV/AIDS, and the timing of the Carnival International of Victoria, which in the past coincided with other religious events. In January ruling party supporters criticized Anglican Bishop James Wong when he said there were a number of irregularities such as voter intimidation and vote buying in the second round of the Presidential elections. In October upon assuming office, President Danny Faure met with members of SIFCO and announced that SIFCO would be consulted on issues of national interest through the office of the vice president.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy in Mauritius promoted religious freedom through regular engagement with representatives of different religious groups.

Sierra Leone

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, subject to the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality, and health; and to the protection other persons' rights and freedoms. Additionally, national laws prohibit religious discrimination and allow all persons to observe their own religious practices and to change religions without interference from the government or members of other religious groups. Government registration is not mandatory for religious groups, but is necessary to obtain tax and other benefits. On November 25, the High Court acquitted, released, and closed the case of seven police officers who were initially charged in May 2015 for arresting three members of the Rastafarian community for smoking marijuana; one of the three Rastafarians, Francis Heffner, died following a beating by the officers. During the year, the Office of National Security (ONS) expressed concerns regarding what it referred to as the emergence of Muslim extremism, including radio stations operated by Shia and Sunni groups engaging in polemical exchanges against each other's religious beliefs. The ONS also reported concerns by Christian and Muslim leaders and civil society groups relating to susceptible unemployed and uneducated youth from the Muslim community joining the Tabligh movement, which preached a fundamentalist form of Islam. In response to these concerns, on August 20, the ONS hosted a workshop entitled "Terrorism Has no Place in Islam," with more than 200 imams, as well as local and foreign Muslim missionaries, to draft a counterterrorism strategy for the country. At the event, participants discussed how Muslim leaders could advise members of their communities to not engage in preaching hate messages against other Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

Religious leaders and others expressed concerns that aggressive proselytization and polemical statements during the past few years, often by foreign-inspired Christian and Muslim fundamentalist groups, were a possible threat to the country's religious harmony. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, coordinated with Christian and Muslim religious groups throughout the year, including by visiting each administrative district in the country to discuss and promote religious harmony.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom through dialogue with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the IRC and

the Council of Imams, including at an interfaith iftar on July 4 during which local Muslim and Christian clergy members discussed religious freedom and tolerance, and their concerns about what they said was growing Islamic fundamentalism. In February embassy officials met with the Roman Catholic bishop to discuss concerns about what the bishop said was the emergence of extremism and fundamentalism. In April an embassy official met with Muslim and Christian religious leaders in several cities in the north of the country to discuss religious freedom and the role of religious communities in supporting democracy and respect for human rights. In September two female Muslim religious leaders shared views regarding the role of Muslim women in society with embassy officers, highlighting what they said was the importance of women speaking out publicly against religious extremism.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 6.0 million (July 2016 estimate). Members of the IRC state the country is approximately 60 percent Muslim (primarily Sunni), 30 percent Christian, and 10 percent Animist. Many individuals regularly blend Christian and Muslim practices with animism in their private and public worship. According to the Pew Research Center's 2010 estimates, there are small communities of Bahais, Hindus, Jews, atheists, animists, and practitioners of voodoo and sorcery. Although there were very few updated statistics available on the Muslim population, Ahmadi Muslims stated their community had 560,000 members. Christians include Anglicans, other Protestants, Roman Catholics, Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox Christians, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Evangelical Christians are a growing minority, drawing members primarily from other Christian groups. Rastafarian leaders report their community has approximately 20,000 members. Many individuals practice both Islam and Christianity.

Tribes living in the Northern Province, such as the Fullah, Themne, Loko, Madingo, and Susu, are predominantly Sunni Muslim. The majority of the Mende, Kono, Kissi, and Sherbro of the South and East Provinces are Christian. Krios live in the western part of Freetown, and are predominantly Christian. The city's eastern neighborhoods are predominantly Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides that no person shall be hindered in exercising freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in a community, in public or in private, to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. These rights may be subject to limitations in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health, or to protect the rights and freedoms of other persons.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs is responsible for religious matters. Religious groups seeking recognition by the ministry must complete registration forms and provide police clearance, proof of funding, and annual work plans to receive tax concessions. There is no penalty for organizations that choose not to file for recognition, except they cannot receive tax exemptions and waiver benefits.

The constitution provides that "except with his own consent" (or if a minor the consent of the parent or guardian), no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony, or observance relates to a religion other than the person's own. The course Religious and Moral Education provides an introduction to Christianity, Islam, African traditional beliefs, and other religious

traditions around the world, as well as teachings about morals and ethics, and is required in all public schools through high school, without choice to opt out. Instruction in a specific religion is permissible only in schools organized by religious groups.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government continued to enforce the law prohibiting the production, sale, and consumption of marijuana. Rastafarians reported that this prohibition restricted their ability to use cannabis as a core component of their religious practices. Members of the Rastafarian community said that police regularly harassed and physically abused them for using cannabis. They also stated that the government continued to refuse to recognize Rastafarian titles to land the community used to construct and operate its temples.

On November 25, the High Court acquitted, released, and closed the case of the seven police officers. The officers were initially charged with manslaughter in May 2015 for arresting three members of the Rastafarian community for smoking marijuana; one of the three Rastafarians, Francis Heffner, died following a beating by the officers.

On May 18, nine police officers reportedly demolished a Rastafarian temple near Freetown. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) reported that, in response to complaints from residents about marijuana smoking in the neighborhood, the officers went to the temple that day to apprehend several adolescents who had been smoking marijuana, and had entered the temple to escape the police. The officers stated that although they damaged the temple's door upon entering to apprehend the adolescents, they did not demolish the structure. The SLP reported the officers confiscated the marijuana, but made no arrests.

During the year, the ONS expressed concerns regarding the possible emergence of what it referred to as Muslim extremism, including radio stations operated by Shia and Sunni groups engaging in polemical exchanges against each other's religious beliefs. The ONS also reported concerns by Christian and Muslim leaders and civil society groups relating to susceptible unemployed and uneducated youth from the Muslim community joining the Tabligh movement, a revivalist Sunni Muslim movement originating in India which preached a fundamentalist form of Islam. The ONS has identified radical Islam as a national security issue and inserted a section on religious radicalization in its counterterrorism strategy. In response to these concerns, on August 20, the ONS hosted a workshop entitled "Terrorism Has no Place in Islam," with more than 200 imams, as well as local and foreign Muslim missionaries, to draft a counterterrorism strategy for the country. At the event, participants discussed how Muslim leaders could advise members of their communities to not engage in preaching hate messages against other Muslim and non-Muslim groups. The IRC reported that participants agreed to a six-month campaign to preach religious tolerance on radio stations and at mosques, and that participants put this initiative into practice.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders and others expressed concerns that aggressive proselytization and polemical statements during the past few years, often by foreign-inspired Christian and Muslim fundamentalist groups, constituted a possible threat to the country's religious harmony. Their activities included Muslim groups broadcasting messages denying the divinity of Christ and calling on Muslims to not wish people a "Merry Christmas," transmitting prayer calls at high volume from mosques located near churches, as well as churches playing Christian revivalist music near mosques at high volumes during Ramadan, Muslim groups burning churches built on the sites of former mosques, and mutually derogatory statements made on Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyya radio stations. The IRC, the SLP, and the ONS identified certain fundamentalist Christian groups, some from Nigeria, and the Tabligh movement, as major players in fomenting religious discord by seeking to alienate adherents of Christianity and Islam from each other.

Most churches and mosques registered with the Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship, or the United Council of Imams. The IRC coordinated with Christian and Muslim religious groups throughout the year, including through visits to each administrative district in the country, to discuss and promote religious harmony. The IRC's membership included only groups deemed to be Christian or Muslim, and Rastafarians and animists were excluded. The Sunni-dominated Muslim leadership on the IRC reportedly sought to exclude Ahmadi Muslims, given Sunni views that the Ahmadiyya are heretical. According to the IRC, Pentecostal churches refused to join the IRC because they rejected collaboration with Muslims.

With government backing, the IRC drafted a code of conduct for guiding interreligious relations and proposed it as an addendum to the IRC's constitution. It includes provisions that the construction of all new mosques and churches are to be located at specific physical distances from each other to avoid Muslim community complaints that certain churches played loud music during Ramadan services in mosques. The code of conduct also seeks to expand IRC membership to include denominations such as Pentecostal groups.

Intermarriage between Christians and Muslims was common, and many families had both Christian and Muslim members living in the same household. Many individuals celebrated religious holidays of other religious groups, regardless of denomination, both at home and in houses of worship.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Throughout the year, U.S. embassy officials met with religious leaders, including Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim clerics, and faith-based NGOs, including the IRC, the Council of Churches, and the Council of Imams, to discuss religious tolerance and harmony and the role of Tabligh and other groups. In July the Ambassador and embassy staff hosted an iftar and prayer ceremony where the Ambassador and Christian and Muslim religious leaders exchanged views on religious freedom and tolerance in the United States and Sierra Leone. The religious leaders noted what they described as the country's history of religious harmony and discussed concerns about the emergence of what they said was Muslim extremism. In April an embassy official met with Muslim and Christian leaders in several cities to discuss religious freedom and the role of religious communities in supporting democracy and respect for human rights. In February embassy officers met with the Roman Catholic bishop to discuss concerns about what the bishop said was the emergence of extremism and fundamentalism. In September two female Muslim religious leaders shared views regarding the role of Muslim women in society with embassy officers, highlighting the importance of Muslim women speaking out publicly against religious extremism.

Somalia

Executive Summary

The provisional federal constitution (PFC) provides for the right of individuals to practice their religion, makes Islam the state religion, prohibits the propagation of any religion other than Islam, and stipulates all laws must comply with the general principles of sharia. The federal government was unable to implement the PFC beyond greater Mogadishu; other areas of the country were outside its control. Federal state and interim regional administrations, including Somaliland, Puntland, the Interim Juba Administration (IJA), the Interim South West Administration (ISWA), and the Interim Galmudug Administration (IGA), governed their respective jurisdictions through local legislation. The constitutions of Somaliland and Puntland declare Islam as the state religion, prohibit Muslims from converting to another religion, bar the propagation of any religion other than Islam, and require all laws to comply with the general principles of sharia.

The terrorist group al-Shabaab killed, maimed, or harassed persons suspected of converting from Islam or those who failed to adhere to the group's religious edicts. During the year, al-Shabaab was responsible for the killings of civilians, government officials, members of parliament, Somali national armed forces and police, and troops from contributing countries of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). On October 26, pro-ISIS fighters occupied a small coastal town in Puntland and proclaimed sharia until Puntland security forces expelled them in early December.

There was strong societal pressure to adhere to Sunni Islamic traditions. Conversion from Islam to another religion remained socially unacceptable in all areas. Those suspected of conversion faced harassment by members of their community.

The U.S. government did not maintain a permanent diplomatic presence in the country. However, travel by U.S. government officials to Somalia increased from previous years, although trips remained limited to selected areas when security conditions permitted. U.S. government engagement to promote religious freedom focused on supporting efforts to bring stability, reestablish rule of law, and advocate for freedom of speech and assembly.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.8 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, more than 99 percent of the Somali population is Sunni Muslim. Members of other religious groups combined constitute less than 1 percent of the population, and include a small Christian community, a small Sufi community, and an unknown number of Shia Muslims. Immigrants and foreign workers, who are mainly from East African countries, belong mainly to other religious groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The PFC provides for the right of individuals to practice their religion, but prohibits the propagation of any religion other than Islam. It states all citizens, regardless of religion, have equal rights and duties before the law, but establishes Islam as the state religion and requires laws to comply with sharia principles. No exemptions from application of sharia legal principles exist for non-Muslims. The PFC does not explicitly prohibit Muslims from converting to other religions.

The constitutions of the regional administrations of Somaliland in the northwest, and Puntland in the northeast make Islam the state religion, prohibit Muslims from converting, prohibit the propagation of any religion other than Islam, and stipulate all laws must comply with the general principles of sharia.

The Somaliland constitution states: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of belief and shall not be compelled to adopt another belief. Islamic Sharia does not accept that a Muslim can renounce his beliefs." The Puntland constitution prohibits any law or culture that contravenes Islam and prohibits demonstrations contrary to Islam. The constitution and other laws of Puntland do not define contravention of Islam.

Other regional administrations, including the IJA, ISWA, and IGA, have constitutions identifying Islam as the official religion. These constitutions stipulate all laws must comply with the general principles of sharia. The IGA and ISWA have not enacted laws directly addressing religious freedom.

The Penal Code developed in 1962 generally remains valid in all regions of the country. It does not prohibit conversion from Islam to another religion, but criminalizes blasphemy and “defamation of Islam,” which carry penalties of up to two years in prison.

The PFC and the Puntland constitution require the president, but not other office holders, to be Muslim. The Somaliland constitution requires, in addition to Somaliland’s president, the candidates for vice president and the House of Representatives to be Muslim.

The judiciary in most areas relies on *xeer* (traditional and customary law), sharia, and the Penal Code. Each community individually regulates and enforces religious expression, often inconsistently.

The Somaliland constitution prohibits the formation of political parties based on a particular religious group, religious beliefs, or interpretation of religious doctrine, while the PFC and the approved constitutions of other regional administrations do not contain this prohibition.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) has legal authority to register religious groups. Guidance on how to register or what is required is inconsistent. The ministry has no ability to enforce such requirements outside of Mogadishu.

Somaliland does not have a mechanism to register religious organizations or specific requirements to register Islamic groups. The Puntland government does not have any laws governing registration or a mechanism to register religious groups. Other regional administrations do not have a mechanism to register religious organizations.

In Puntland, religious schools and places of worship must obtain permission to operate from the Puntland Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs. In Somaliland, religious schools and places of worship must obtain permission to operate from the Somaliland Ministry of Religion. Neither Puntland nor Somaliland law delineates consequences for operating without permission. All other regional administrations require places of worship and religious schools to obtain permission to operate from local authorities.

The federal Ministry of Education has the mandate to regulate religious instruction throughout the country. Federal and regional authorities require Islamic instruction in all schools, public or private, except those operated by non-Muslims. The federal government is reviewing and taking steps to standardize the national curriculum, in part to regulate Islamic instruction. Non-Muslim students attending public schools may request an exemption from Islamic instruction, but according to federal and regional authorities, there were no such requests.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights.

Government Practices

Federal and regional governments maintained bans on the propagation of religions other than Islam, but there were no reports of enforcement. According to federal and regional government officials, there were no cases of individuals charged with apostasy, blasphemy, or defamation of Islam.

The government reportedly did not strictly enforce the registration requirement for religious groups opening schools for lay or religious instruction. Many religious groups did not register, but some religious groups said that the government did not pursue adverse actions against them.

The Somaliland government neither banned unregistered religious groups nor imposed financial penalties on any religious groups. In October Somaliland authorities allowed the reopening of a Catholic church in Hargeisa. The authorities said they had closed the church for several years because of the danger Christians faced in the overwhelmingly Muslim country.

The Puntland government neither banned nor imposed financial penalties on any religious groups.

On October 4, the minister of religious affairs and endowment said the ministry wanted to “create spaces for non-Muslim and religious minorities” to worship, but the current security environment undermined those efforts. He added that the ministry also contended with what he stated was Wahhabi influence from some Gulf countries.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Al-Shabaab continued to impose violently its own interpretation of Islamic law and practices on other Muslims. Violent conflicts continued between al-Shabaab and the federal government and its allies. Al-Shabaab retained control of some towns and rural areas, from which it regrouped to strike into urban areas using a wide variety of tactics. The group recaptured towns, including Tiye glow, El-Alif, and Halgan, after Ethiopian forces withdrew from areas in southwestern and central Somalia.

Al-Shabaab forces targeted and killed federal government officials and their allies, calling them non-Muslims or apostates. On July 27, al-Shabaab militants targeted an AMISOM base in Mogadishu, killing at least 13 people, nine of whom were UN security personnel. Al-Shabaab spokesperson Abdulaziz Abu Muscab said the group targeted the base as a symbol of foreign forces’ occupation of their Muslim country. Al-Shabaab continued its campaign to characterize the AMISOM peacekeeping forces as “Christians” intent on invading and occupying the country. In January al-Shabaab took credit for the attack on the El Adde base, in which more than 140 mostly Christian, Kenyan soldiers serving under AMISOM died. The attackers stated “the attack [was a] message to the Kenyan Government that... invasion of Muslim lands...by the Kenyan crusaders will not be without severe consequences.”

Al-Shabaab continued to threaten to execute anyone suspected of converting to Christianity. In the areas it controlled, al-Shabaab continued to ban cinemas, television, music, the internet, and watching sporting events. It prohibited the sale of khat (a popular stimulant drug), smoking, and behavior it characterized as un-Islamic, such as shaving beards. It also enforced a strict requirement that women wear full veils.

Al-Shabaab continued to harass secular and faith-based humanitarian aid organizations, threatening the lives of their personnel and accusing them of seeking to convert Somalis to Christianity. A high-level Catholic Church official, who helped reopened the Catholic church in Hargeisa in October, said “there is no way of having a presence in Mogadishu...all pastoral work is done secretly.”

Fear of reprisals from al-Shabaab often prevented religious groups from operating freely. Al-Shabaab reportedly threatened to close mosques in areas it controlled if the mosques’ teachings did not conform to the group’s interpretation of Islam.

In areas under its control, al-Shabaab continued to mandate schools teach a militant form of jihad emphasizing that students should wage war against those it deemed infidels, including countries in the region, the federal government, and AMISOM.

Some al-Shabaab sympathizers, particularly in strongholds such as Barawe, Lower Shabelle, reportedly viewed the group as protecting Islam.

Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama’a, a regional militia consisting of Sufis opposed to the strict interpretations of Islam propagated by groups such as al-Shabaab, controlled Dhusamareb, a small town in central Somalia, and in previous years residents conformed to the group’s demands that they adhere to its interpretation of Islam; however, there were no such reports during the year.

On October 26, 50 ISIS fighters took control of Qandala, a small coastal town in Puntland, and a large number of residents fled. Fighters raised the ISIS flag and proclaimed sharia; there were no reported casualties. Puntland security forces expelled the ISIS

fighters in early December.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There reportedly continued to be strong societal pressure to adhere to Sunni Islam traditions.

Conversion from Islam to another religion remained socially unacceptable, and individuals suspected of conversion and their families were reportedly subject to harassment from members of their local communities.

Christians and members of other non-Muslim religious groups were reportedly unable to practice their religion openly out of fear of harassment across most of the country. The small Christian community continued to keep a low profile with regard to religious beliefs and practices. Other non-Islamic groups likely also refrained from openly practicing their religion.

There was one Catholic church in Hargeisa, Somaliland. A high-level Catholic Church official noted fewer than 10 people attended Mass, but said the church's presence was important. There were no public places of worship for non-Muslims in other parts of the country.

In Somaliland, more women were wearing full veils, fewer shops were playing music, and there was increased construction of mosques, according to a Hargeisa-based observer. The observer noted there was pressure to live as a "serious" Muslim in response to perceptions that life in the Western world was becoming more hostile to Muslims.

Private schools were the primary source of education. The majority offered religious instruction in Islam. Externally funded madrassahs throughout the country provided inexpensive basic education and many adhered to Salafist ideology, especially in al-Shabaab controlled areas.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government did not maintain a permanent diplomatic presence in the country. Travel by U.S. government officials to the country, however, increased during the year, although trips remained limited to select areas and only when security conditions permitted. Embassy officials met with government officials and religious leaders to advocate the promotion of religious tolerance. U.S. government efforts to promote religious freedom focused on supporting the efforts of the current government to bring stability, reestablish rule of law, and advocate for freedom of speech and assembly.

South Africa

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and belief and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The government does not require religious groups to register; however, registered groups receive tax-exempt status. In October the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religion and Linguistics Communities (CRL) released its Preliminary Report of the Hearings on Commercialization of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief System. The commission found evidence of commercialization of religion; illegal and unethical advertising of religious and traditional healing services; and a lack of financial transparency and adherence to tax rules by religious entities. The CRL recommended parliament adopt legislation that would create a peer review council, which would consist of peers from various religious groups that would grant individual religious leaders

permission to operate. Each religious group would then have accredited umbrella organizations, which would recommend the licensing of institutions and individual practitioners. Several Christian organizations, however, expressed concern that the broad scale regulation of all religious institutions and practitioners was unconstitutional and unnecessary. In September the Western Cape High Court in Cape Town heard a case brought by the Women's Legal Centre (WLC) regarding the alleged failure of the government to grant Muslim marriages the same status as civil ones. Also in September Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba denied a U.S. clergy member entry to the country on the grounds of hate speech.

In July twins Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie were arrested on charges of planning to attack U.S. and Jewish targets. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) reported a drop in the number of anti-Semitic incidents during the year, which the organization attributed to a decrease in reports of Israeli-Palestinian conflicts in the country's media. The SAJBD recorded 38 anti-Semitic incidents from January to November in comparison to 55 from January to November 2015. There were several anti-Muslim incidents, including an incident of hate speech written on walls in Tshwane (Pretoria) and a protest over the construction of a new mosque in Valhalla, also in Tshwane.

U.S. government officials met with religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including Muslim and Jewish representatives, to gauge and discuss issues of religious freedom, including cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 54.3 million (July 2016 estimate). According to a 2010 Pew Research Center report, 81 percent of the population is Christian. Approximately 15 percent of the population adheres to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation; some of these individuals are likely adhere to indigenous beliefs. Muslims constitute 1.7 percent of the population, while Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional indigenous beliefs together constitute less than 4 percent of the population. Many indigenous persons adhere to a belief system combining Christian and indigenous religious practices. The Church of Scientology estimates it has approximately 100,000 members.

The Pew Research Center estimates 84 percent of the Christian population is Protestant, 11 percent Catholic, and 5 percent other denominations (2010 estimate). African independent churches constitute the largest group of Christian churches, including the Zion Christian Church (approximately 11 percent of the population), the Apostolic Church (approximately 10 percent), and a number of Pentecostal and charismatic groups. Other Christian groups include Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, and members of the Greek Orthodox, Dutch Reformed, and Congregational churches.

Persons of Indian or other Asian heritage account for 2.5 percent of the total population. Roughly half of the ethnic Indian population is Hindu, and the majority resides in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The Muslim community includes Cape Malays of Malayan-Indonesian descent, individuals of Indian or Pakistani descent, and approximately 70,000 Somali nationals and refugees. The SAJBD estimates the Jewish community at 75,000 to 80,000 persons, the majority of whom live in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and belief including the right to form, join, and maintain religious associations. It prohibits religious discrimination and specifies freedom of expression does not extend to advocacy of hatred based on religion. The

constitution permits legislation recognizing systems of personal and family law to which persons professing a particular religion adhere. It also allows religious observances in state or state-supported institutions, provided they are voluntary and conducted on an equitable basis. These rights may be limited if the limitation is “reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom” and takes account of “all relevant factors.” Cases of discrimination against persons on the grounds of religion may be taken to Equality Courts, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), and the Constitutional Court. The constitution also provides for the promotion and respect of languages used for religious purposes, including, but not limited to, Arabic, Hebrew, and Sanskrit.

The constitution allows for the presence and operation of the CRL with the mission of fostering the rights of communities to freely observe and practice their cultures, religions, and language.

The law does not require religious groups to register; however, registered religious and other nonprofit groups can qualify as public benefit organizations (PBOs), allowing them to open bank accounts and exempting them from paying income tax. To register as a PBO, groups must submit a nonprofit organization application, including their constitution, contact information, and list of officers and documentation stating they meet a number of prescribed requirements that largely ensure accounting and tax compliance, to the provincial social development office. Once registered, the group must submit annual reports on any changes to this information, important achievements and meetings, and financial information, as well as an accountant’s report.

The government allows, but does not require religious education in public schools but prohibits advocating the tenets of a particular religion.

The law allows marriages to be conducted under customary law; however, it only applies to “those customs and usages traditionally observed among the indigenous African people.”

The constitution grants detained persons visitation rights with their chosen religious counselor.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In October the CRL released its Preliminary Report of the Hearings on Commercialization of Religion and Abuse of People’s Belief System. This was a response to reports of some church leaders instructing their congregations to eat live snakes and drink gasoline. The CRL summoned officials from religious organizations for presentations on their respective religious and organizational practices. The commission found evidence of commercialization of religion; illegal and unethical advertising of religious and traditional healing services; and a lack of financial transparency and adherence to tax rules by religious entities. The CRL recommended parliament adopt legislation that would create a peer review council, which would consist of peers from various religious groups that would grant individual religious leaders permission to operate. Each religious group would then have accredited umbrella organizations, which would recommend the licensing of institutions and individual practitioners. In response to the report, the South African Council of Churches stated “we all have a problem with rogue pastors” but that “self-regulation might have some challenges and problems passing constitutional muster.” Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA), a non-profit Christian organization, expressed concern that the broad scale regulation of all religious institutions and practitioners was unconstitutional and unnecessary, as there were already existing laws in place that could deal with problems identified by the commission in the report. FORSA added that the problems the commission identified should not be dealt with by creating another law that would potentially limit religious freedom, but to implement existing laws to stop those who are not legally compliant and perpetrating abuses in the name of religion.

In September the Western Cape High Court in Cape Town heard a case brought by the Women’s Legal Centre (WLC) regarding the nonrecognition of Muslim marriages by the state. A draft bill prepared specifically to recognize Muslim marriages under the law was published for comment in 2011, but was not proposed to parliament. The WLC stated that the failure of current legislation to recognize Muslim marriages degraded Muslim women’s rights. The Association of Muslim Women of South Africa and the United Ulama Council of South Africa opposed the WLC case, stating that it violated freedom of religion by singling out Islam. According to media sources, the president, the minister of home affairs, and the minister of justice and correctional services all filed papers opposing the WLC on the grounds that Muslim communities in the country did not support the legislation. The High Court postponed the case until 2017 to permit the SAHRC and the CRL also to be heard on the matter.

In September Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba denied a U.S. clergy member entry to the country on the grounds of hate speech, which by law is specifically excluded from protection of free speech in the constitution. The CRL supported the home affairs minister’s decision. The Jewish community also welcomed the move citing the individual’s previous Holocaust denial statements and anti-Semitic comments that included calling the Talmud blasphemous.

The December 2015 case of Cassim Mahomed Jasat, a local government education employee who posted anti-Semitic statements on other people’s social media sites, was still in mediation with the SAHRC at year’s end.

Several government sessions began with prayers or remarks from religious leaders, including from Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and traditional African faith communities. On May 22, the National Day of Prayer, President Jacob Zuma gave remarks at the prayer service with various religious, civil society, and government leaders.

In a September 17 speech to leadership of *The Christian News*, Minister of Communications Faith Muthambi reaffirmed the country’s commitment to religious tolerance, describing South Africa as “a secular democracy with freedom of religion.”

The Church of Scientology reported a cooperative partnership with the government in the Church’s nationwide anti-drug use campaign.

The government and schools accommodated religious groups’ holy days when scheduling national examinations. Prisoners and detainees were permitted religious observances.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In July authorities arrested twins Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie on charges of planning to attack U.S. and Jewish targets in South Africa. The individuals were charged under antiterrorism legislation and were in jail pending trial at the end of the year.

The SAJBD recorded 38 anti-Semitic incidents from January to November, in comparison to 55 from January to November 2015. The incidents included verbal threats and intimidation (10), verbal abuse (15), abusive communications – all mediums (8), and graffiti/offensive slogans (5). In November the messages “[Expletive] the Jews” and “Kill a Jew” were painted on buildings at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Some media sources speculated the graffiti was linked to demands for the release of #FeesMustFall leader Mcebo Dlamini from prison where he was awaiting trial on several criminal charges; however, no one publicly took responsibility for the graffiti. In 2015 Dlamini made several anti-Semitic comments on the radio and through social media. The Democratic Alliance Student Organization at the University of Witwatersrand reportedly submitted evidence to the SAHRC and the South African Police Service for further investigation into anti-Semitic graffiti. The university condemned the act and stated it would hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The university also stated it planned to meet with members of the South African Union of Jewish Students concerning the matter.

In January the media reported singer-songwriter Loyiso Matana Ka-Zikhali posted anti-Semitic comments on his Facebook page that

included, “Indeed Zionist Jews are a cancer to the world,” and “The native agenda of the Jew is to control the currency and economy.” No legal action was taken against him.

In September on Eid al-Adha, vandals painted anti-Muslim messages on walls in various locations in the township of Eersterust in Tshwane which has a mosque and a sizable Muslim community. Signs included “No Muslims” and “[Expletive] Muslims.” The perpetrators were identified and no arrests were made.

In June the principal of King’s School, a Christian school in the Johannesburg suburb of Linbro Park, was accused of being “Islamophobic” for urging parents, in a letter, to “pray for Muslims to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.” The Gauteng Department of Education strongly condemned the principal’s comments. The principal issued a public apology.

In June a guesthouse owner in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province refused service to black patrons on the basis of his religion. According to media sources, the owner reportedly cited the Bible as his basis of belief and said blacks were servants, sub-human, and that the races should not mix. A few days later the owner confirmed his business was no longer operating commercially after the media publicized his statements. KZN Member of the Executive Council for Economic Development and Tourism Sihle Zikalala filed criminal charges against the owner for discrimination, hate speech, illegal trading, and tax evasion and began proceedings for the owner’s eviction from the lodge.

In April 3,000 of the 10,000 residents of Valhalla, near Pretoria, protested the future construction of a mosque. The media reported some protestors threatened to slaughter pigs on the construction site, while others said the future mosque would become a breeding ground for terrorists. Some protestors held signs that read “Paris Brussels Valhalla??? NO!” and “Geen ISIS in Valhalla (No ISIS in Valhalla).” In March 2013 the Tshwane city council donated the land to the Tshwane Islamic Trust to build the mosque in an effort to create social cohesion and promote diversity in the area. Tshwane Mayor Kgosientso Ramokgopa noted the city had previously donated land to two Christian groups for houses of worship and was in the process of finalizing three more donations. The city councilor at the time, who later became a member of the Mayoral Committee for Tshwane, Sakkie du Plooy, said Valhalla was a Christian Afrikaner community and if the mosque were built, residents would immediately leave as they wouldn’t be able to bear the noise from the mosque. He also expressed concern that Muslims would “expand” in the area.

FORSA reported some Christian wedding venues received threats of legal action for allegedly refusing to allow gay wedding ceremonies to be performed in their facilities. The owners reportedly did not object to the use of their facilities for receptions, but objected to gay weddings due to their Christian beliefs. FORSA expressed concern that draft legislation on hate speech would make it a criminal offense for Christian churches to speak out against homosexuality. The draft bill would criminalize the hate crimes and hate speech based on one’s race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth and related intolerance.

In January the SAHRC found corporal punishment in the home unconstitutional and unlawful in response to a 2015 complaint from an atheist couple against the Joshua Generation Church for violation of human rights. The couple stated the Church’s promotion of spanking to correct children’s behavior violated children’s rights. The Church appealed to the SAHRC on substantive and procedural grounds and was awaiting the SAHRC’s ruling at year’s end. FORSA filed a complaint with the CRL against the SAHRC, citing the SAHRC’s findings and stating its recommendations violated religious freedom and rights. The atheist couple also lodged a complaint with the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) that the Church discriminated against women in its belief and practice that a husband is head of the household and men are heads of church governance. The matter was also under consideration with the CGE at year’s end. The CRL issued reports in favor of the Church in both cases.

Although the alleged perpetrators were identified by the end of the year, no formal charges were filed in response to a 2015 incident in which three Jewish teenagers wearing kippahs were allegedly physically assaulted. The perpetrators reportedly made anti-Semitic

comments, including associating their religion with political tension in the Middle East.

No formal ruling was released as of year's end regarding the 2015 case of Port Elizabeth lawyer Maureen Jansen, who posted anti-Semitic statements on social media. The SAJBD lodged a complaint of hate speech with the SAHRC, which referred the matter to the Equality Court.

According to the SAJBD, the SAHRC ordered the Western Cape provincial secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions to pay one month's salary as a fine for calling for the 2014 killing of SAJBD members in retaliation for deaths of Palestinians in Gaza. Authorities made no arrests nor imposed penalties regarding the 2014 case of a Congress of South African Students member for placing a pig's head in the kosher section of a Woolworth's grocery store in

Cape Town in protest of the store's marketing of Israeli produce.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with religious leaders and NGOs, including individuals from the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA), the Church of Scientology, and the SAJBD to discuss the environment for religious freedom and concern over cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

During a trip in January, the U.S. Special Envoy for the Rights of LGBTI Persons met with representatives of the Inner Circle, an LGBTI-friendly mosque, in Cape Town. The meeting focused on the importance of tolerance, understanding, and nondiscrimination.

In September an embassy representative met with members of the SAJBD to discuss past incidences of anti-Semitism still being heard in the Equality Courts and SAHRC. In October an embassy officer met with the MJC and ICSA to assess religious freedom from the Muslim community's perspective and discuss ways the embassy could help promote tolerance of Islam.

South Sudan

Executive Summary

The transitional constitution stipulates separation of religion and state, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides religious groups freedom to worship and assemble freely, organize themselves, teach, own property, receive financial contributions, communicate and issue publications on religious matters, and establish charitable institutions.

Christian and Muslim religious leaders regularly communicated and coordinated activities, particularly around peacebuilding and humanitarian aid. Religious and civil society leaders as well as government officials stated the country had a tolerant, interfaith society, despite the ongoing fighting between government and opposition forces throughout the country.

U.S. embassy officials met with Advisor on Religious Affairs Sheikh Tahir Bior in November to discuss the context of religious tolerance and freedom. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious freedom through discussions and outreach with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 12.5 million (July 2016 estimate). The majority of the population is Christian.

Studies from the early 2000s estimated Muslims constituted between 18 and 35 percent of the population, but many believe the number of Muslims declined through migration to Sudan after South Sudanese independence in 2011. The Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project report from 2010 estimated Christians make up 60.5 percent of the population, indigenous religions 32.9 percent, and Muslims 6.2 percent. Other religious groups with small populations include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism.

According to the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) and the government Bureau of Religious Affairs, the groups that make up the majority of Christians are Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Sudan Interior Church, Presbyterian Evangelical, and the African Inland Church. Smaller populations of Eritrean Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses are also present. A substantial part of the population in isolated parts of the country adheres to indigenous religious beliefs or combines Christian and indigenous practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The transitional constitution stipulates separation of religion and state. It prohibits religious discrimination, even if the president declares a state of emergency. It states that all religions are to be treated equally and that religion should not be used for divisive purposes.

The transitional constitution provides for the right of religious groups to worship or assemble freely in connection with any religion or belief, solicit and receive voluntary financial contributions, own property for religious purposes, and establish places of worship. The transitional constitution also provides religious groups the freedom to write, issue, and disseminate religious publications; communicate with individuals and communities in matters of religion at both the national and international levels; teach religion in places "suitable" for these purposes; train, appoint, elect, or designate by succession their religious leaders; and observe religious holidays.

The government requires religious groups to register with the state government and with the Ministry for Humanitarian Affairs through the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). There were reports the ministry changed the requirements for registration during the year, but details were not available as of year's end. Previously, faith-based organizations were required to provide their constitution, a statement of faith documenting their doctrines, beliefs, objectives and holy book, a list of executive members, and a registration fee of \$100 for national or \$200 for international faith-based organizations. International faith-based organizations were required also to provide a copy of a previous registration with another government and a letter from the international organization commissioning its activities in South Sudan.

The transitional constitution specifies the regulation of religious matters within each state is the executive and legislative responsibility of the state government. It establishes the responsibility of government at all levels to protect monuments and places of religious importance from destruction or desecration.

The transitional constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain "appropriate" faith-based charitable or humanitarian institutions.

The transitional constitution guarantees every citizen access to education without discrimination based on religion.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On May 15, Sister Veronika Rackova, a Slovakian missionary working as a doctor at the St. Bakhita's Medical Center in the southern town of Yei, was shot in the stomach while driving an ambulance with a patient. According to news sources, she died from her wounds after being airlifted to Kenya for surgery. Members of the military reportedly shot her at a checkpoint. Government authorities arrested three soldiers in connection with the shooting, the motive for which remained unclear.

Media sources reported some religious institutions were looted as government and opposition forces continued fighting throughout the country, and as criminality increased. For example, in late October media sources reported armed men wearing military uniforms forcibly entered the Good Shepherd Peace Center, established by the Catholic Church to provide a place for peacebuilding and trauma healing, and robbed religious workers at gunpoint.

The Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation, an interreligious body formed by President Salva Kiir Mayardit in April 2013 with the support of donor funds, closed during the year in anticipation that it would be merged into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission is envisaged in the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (the peace agreement). At year's-end, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission had not yet been established.

Both a Christian representative and a Muslim representative read prayers at most official events, with the government often providing translation from English to Arabic.

Several religious groups were represented in government positions. President Kiir, a Catholic, employed a high-level advisor on religious affairs, Tahir Bior Ajak, a leader of the Islamic community in the country. Additional Muslim representation in government included at least one governor and 14 members of the 400-member Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA). There are no reserved seats for religious groups in the TNLA; however, all principal religious groups were represented.

Although not mandated by the government, religious education was generally included in public secondary school and university curricula. Theoretically, students could attend either a Christian or an Islamic course, and those with no religious affiliation could choose between the two courses. Because of resource constraints, however, some schools only offered education in one course. Christian and Muslim private religious schools set their own religious curriculum without government interference.

Although the Ministry for Humanitarian Affairs had not released information regarding new registration policies, no religious groups reported problems with registering or with operating as an unregistered religious group.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to U.S. Christian news sources, arsonists set on fire the Sudanese Church of Christ worship building in the refugee settlement of Yida on January 16, and the fire reportedly burned both the exterior and interior and destroyed all chairs, a pulpit, and copies of Arabic Bibles. The news sources reported authorities arrested four Muslim suspects. One of the accused reportedly said they were "sent from Sudan to attack churches and aid workers helping Nuba Christians from Sudan."

Government officials and religious leaders, including the advisor on religious affairs, reported a high degree of respect for religious freedom in the country. The advisor stated individuals worshiped freely and reported no religiously motivated attacks. Christian and Muslim religious leaders regularly communicated and coordinated activities, particularly around peacebuilding and humanitarian aid. The SSCC, in implementing its Action Plan for Peace, held a series of community-level dialogues aimed at facilitating mutual

understanding and respect among various groups, including religious groups. The SSCC and the Islamic Council served as hubs for coordination of the peacebuilding events. Churches were often used as shelters for those seeking to escape violence. For example, St. Mary's cathedral in Wau sheltered 1,000 residents after people fled intense fighting in the town in June.

Religious leaders worked together across denominations to advance peace. For example, in October the archbishops of the Catholic and Episcopal Churches and the leader of the Presbyterian Church in South Sudan traveled to Rome at the invitation of the pope to discuss the political crisis in the country. Catholic Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro of the Archdiocese of Juba said their visit focused on how to bring the ongoing fighting to an end. According to a spokesperson for the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), the visit brought a renewed energy to the faith-based community's efforts.

Leaders from all major religious groups attended ceremonial public events, including the opening of the National Assembly and Independence Day ceremonies. The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission of the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan was established with two faith-based leaders, one Christian and one Muslim, and charged with monitoring the ceasefire.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with Advisor on Religious Affairs Sheikh Tahir Bior in November to discuss the preservation of religious tolerance and freedom in the face of renewed conflict. The U.S. Ambassador regularly participated in discussions in Juba with leaders of the South Sudan Islamic Council, the South Sudan Council of Churches, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Presbyterian Church, and the Catholic Church.

Sudan

Executive Summary

The Interim National Constitution (INC) provides for freedom of religious creed and the rights to worship, assemble, and maintain places of worship. Some laws and government practices are based on the government's interpretation of a sharia system of jurisprudence and do not provide protections for religious minorities, including minority Muslim groups. The law criminalizes apostasy, blasphemy, and conversion from Islam to another religion, as well as questioning the Quran, the Sahaba (the Companions of the Prophet), or the wives of the Prophet. While the law does not specifically address proselytizing, the government reportedly criminalizes proselytizing under what it considers the crime of apostasy. There were eyewitness reports of the government arresting, detaining, or intimidating Christian clergy and church members, as well as an imam, denying permits for the construction of new churches, closing or demolishing existing churches and attempting to close church schools, restricting non-Muslim religious groups and missionaries from operating in or entering the country, and censoring religious materials and leaders. According to human rights activists, authorities charged and convicted Christian and Muslim women with "indecent dress" for wearing pants and fined and lashed them accordingly on a daily basis. The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) arrested Imam Yousif Abdullah Abaker in July following a sermon criticizing the performance of the central and state governments and holding them accountable for the loss of lives, particularly in Sudan's Darfur region. At year's end, Abaker was being held in Al Huda Prison without charges. Four Christians, who were arrested in December 2015 and detained for eight months, were charged in August with eight crimes, including espionage and "warring against the state," both of which carry the death penalty. Their trials remained ongoing at year's end. A member of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPECES) who was also arrested in December 2015 was released in May, although never charged. Authorities arrested and detained 14 individuals for three days for protesting the sale of a SPECES-

owned school by a government-appointed board. They were subsequently released on bail, convicted of disturbing the public peace, and fined. Reportedly, women (including women of Christian and of Nuba origin) were fined or lashed for wearing “indecent dress.” The government attempted to expropriate another SPECS-owned school and temporarily detained nine people, but a court ultimately blocked the expropriation. The authorities reportedly demolished two churches (one Catholic and one Presbyterian) in Soba County of Khartoum State in December, stating the churches were on publicly-owned land. The authorities gave three churches in the Hajj Yusuf area of Khartoum notice of imminent demolition due to improper land registration documents. The government issued a written notice to the Soba County Sudan Church of Christ that the church had no legal claim to the land on which it was built in 1986. The Sudanese Council of Churches (SCC) and lawyers appealed on behalf of the churches. As of the end of the year, the churches had not been demolished.

There were reports Muslim citizens sometimes harassed and intimidated non-Muslims. Muslims and non-Muslims said a small, growing, and sometimes vocal minority of Salafist groups continued to be a concern to them on religious grounds and because some advocate violence.

In high-level discussions with the government, U.S. officials encouraged respect for religious freedom and the protection of minority religious groups. The U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised specific cases with government officials and emphasized the government’s need to bring the country’s legal framework into compliance with its international human rights obligations. In meetings with the foreign minister, the U.S. Special Envoy raised the issue of the detained pastors, urging the government to grant a fair and speedy trial. Embassy officials stressed that respect for religious freedom was crucial to improved relations with the United States. The embassy maintained close contact with religious leaders, faith groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and monitored and attended many of the legal proceedings for those prosecuted in connection with their religious beliefs.

Since 1999, Sudan has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On October 31, the Secretary of State redesignated Sudan as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the restriction on making certain appropriated funds available for assistance to the Government of Sudan in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, currently set forth in section 7042(j) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (Div. K, Pub. L. 113-76), and any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as this provision, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 36.7 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the government, approximately 97 percent of the population is Muslim following the separation of South Sudan in 2011. It is unclear whether government estimates include South Sudanese (predominantly Christian or animist) who did not leave after the 2011 split or returned after conflict erupted in South Sudan in 2013, or other non-South Sudanese, non-Muslim groups. Many religious advocacy groups estimate non-Muslims make up more than 20 percent of the population.

Almost all Muslims are Sunni, although there are significant distinctions among followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi orders. There are also small Shia Muslim communities based predominantly in Khartoum. At least one Jewish family remains in the Khartoum area.

The government reports there are 36 Christian denominations in the country. Christians reside throughout the country, primarily in major cities such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts

of the Nuba Mountains.

There are relatively small, but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile, Gezira, and parts of eastern Sudan, but the government has not released statistics on these populations. There are also Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities, largely made up of refugees and migrants, in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Sudan Church of Christ, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church of the Sudan, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The membership of these groups is difficult to gauge due to lack of records in some groups, a lack of current information provided by the government, and restricted access to groups in conflict areas.

Government statistics indicate less than 1 percent of the population, primarily in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States, adheres to traditional African religious beliefs. Some Christians and Muslims, however, incorporate aspects of these traditional beliefs into their religious practice.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The INC provides for freedom of religious creed and worship, and grants individuals the right to declare their religious beliefs and manifest them by way of worship, education, practice, or performance, subject to requirements of laws and public order. It prohibits the coercion of individuals to adopt a faith they do not believe in or to engage in rites or services to which they do not voluntarily consent. These rights may be suspended during a state of emergency. The INC states that nationally enacted legislation shall be based on sharia. The INC has not been amended to reflect the 2011 independence of South Sudan.

The INC allows religious groups to establish and maintain humanitarian and charitable institutions, acquire property and materials related to their religious rites and customs, write and disseminate religious publications, teach religion, solicit public and private contributions, select their own leaders, observe days of rest, celebrate religious holidays, and communicate with constituents on matters of religion.

The INC states that where the majority of residents do not practice the religion or customs on which the national legislation is based, citizens may introduce new legislation consistent with their religion and customs or refer the existing legislation to the Council of States, the lower house of parliament.

The INC denies recognition to any political party that discriminates based on religion and specifically prohibits religious discrimination against candidates for the national civil service. Constitutional violations of freedom of religion may be pursued in the Constitutional Court; however, cases of discrimination often originate and are addressed in lower courts dealing with civil or criminal charges.

National laws are based on a sharia system of jurisprudence. The criminal code states the law, including state and local, shall be based on sharia sources and include *hudood*, *qisas*, and *diyah* principles (specific serious crimes and related restitution and punishment). The criminal code takes into consideration multiple sharia schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*). The Islamic Panel of Scholars and Preachers (Fiqh Council) determines under which conditions a particular school of thought will apply. Other criminal and civil laws, including public order laws, are determined at the state and local level.

The law provides no bar to individuals who convert from another religion to Islam. The criminal code does not explicitly mention proselytizing, but criminalizes both conversion from Islam to any other faith (i.e. apostasy) and acts that encourage conversion from Islam. Those who convert from Islam to another religion as well as any Muslim who questions the teachings of the Quran, the Sahaba (the Companions of the Prophet), or the wives of the Prophet may also be considered guilty of apostasy and sentenced to death. Those charged with apostasy are allowed to repent within a period decided by the court, but may still face up to five years in prison.

The criminal code's section on "religious offenses" includes articles on violations against any religion, such as insulting religion or blasphemy, disturbing places of worship, and trespassing upon places of burial. The criminal code states, "whoever insults any religion, their rights or beliefs or sanctifications or seeks to excite feelings of contempt and disrespect against the believers thereof" shall be punished with up to six months in prison, flogging of up to 40 lashes, and/or a fine. The article includes provisions that prescribe penalties for any non-Muslim who curses the Prophet Muhammad, his wives, or members of his respective households of up to five years' imprisonment and 40 lashes.

The Ministry of Guidance and Endowments (MGE) regulates religious practice, including activities such as reviewing Friday sermons at mosques. The president appoints the Fiqh Council, an official body of 40 Muslim religious scholars responsible for explaining and interpreting Islamic jurisprudence, to four-year renewable terms. The council advises the government and issues fatwas on religious matters, including levying customs duties on the importation of religious materials, payment of interest on loans for public infrastructure, and determination of government-allotted annual leave for Islamic holidays. The panel's opinions are not legally binding. Muslim religious scholars are free to present differing religious and political viewpoints in public.

To gain official recognition by the government, religious groups must register at the state level with the MGE, or a related ministry such as the Ministry of Culture or the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), depending on the nature of the group and its activities. The HAC oversees NGOs and nonprofit organizations. Religious groups that also engage in humanitarian or development activities must register with those bodies as nonprofit NGOs by filing a standard application required by the HAC for both local and international NGOs. The application must include the names and addresses of founding members, a copy of the organization's constitution, and an organization chart and be accompanied by a fee. Such organizations must have at least 30 members, although the relevant minister may register an organization with fewer members with proof of its financial stability. In addition, international NGOs legally may not be from a country in a state of war with Sudan and are required to be registered in its country of origin, have an approved registration certificate from the Sudanese embassy or diplomatic mission, present evidence of its financial and technical capabilities, and meet other conditions the minister may apply. Groups registered with the HAC must then have their activities approved and financial statements reviewed by the government. Only religious groups that register are eligible to apply for other administrative procedures, including land ownership, tax exemptions, and work permits.

The state-mandated education curriculum requires all schools, including international schools and private schools operated by Christian groups, to provide Islamic education classes to Muslim students, from preschool through the second year of university. Public schools do not require non-Muslims to attend Islamic education classes, but must provide them with other religious instruction. A minimum of 15 Christian students per class is required for Christian instruction in public schools. According to the Ministry of Education, following the separation of South Sudan, this ratio has not been met in most schools. Non-Muslim students therefore attend religious study classes of their own religion outside of regular school hours in order to fulfill the requirement for all students to receive religious instruction.

The curriculum for religious education is determined by the Ministry of Education. According to the ministry, the Islamic curriculum is intended to reflect one form of Islam, which, according to government representatives, requires following the Sunni tradition.

The MGE determines, along with the state-level entities responsible for land grants and planning, whether to provide authorizations or permits to build new houses of worship, taking into account zoning concerns such as the distance between religious institutions and population density (the allocation of land to religious entities is determined at the state level). The MGE is mandated to assist both mosques and churches in obtaining tax exemptions and duty-free permits to import items such as furniture and religious items for houses of worship; it also assists visitors attending meetings sponsored by religious groups and activities to obtain tourist visas through the Ministry of Interior. The MGE also coordinates travel for the Hajj and Umra for government representatives.

Public order laws, based largely on the government's interpretation of sharia, vary by state. These laws prohibit indecent dress and other "offenses of honor, reputation, and public morality." Authorities primarily enforce such laws in large cities and enforce laws governing indecent dress against both Muslims and non-Muslims. The criminal code states acts are contrary to public morality if they are deemed so by the religion of the person performing the act or the custom of the country where the act occurs. In practice, the special Public Order police and courts have wide latitude in interpreting what dress or behaviors are indecent and in arresting and passing sentence on accused offenders.

Some aspects of the criminal code specify punishments for Muslims based on government interpretation of sharia punishment principles. For example, the criminal code stipulates 40 lashes for a Muslim who drinks, possesses, or sells alcohol; no punishment is prescribed for a non-Muslim who drinks or possesses alcohol in private. The criminal code stipulates if a non-Muslim is arrested for public drinking, possessing, or selling of alcohol, he or she is subject to trial, but the punishment will not be based on *hudood* principles. The INC was amended in August to change the penalty for adultery with a married person from stoning to hanging (a punishment more commonly executed than stoning, according to legal experts). The penalty for adultery by an unmarried person is 100 lashes. An unmarried man could additionally be banished up to one year. These penalties apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Adultery includes marriages not recognized by the government. The code was not changed after the 2011 secession of South Sudan and most articles of the code specify punishments according to region, the North (majority Muslim) and the then-South (majority Christian), rather than the religion of the accused.

Under the law, the justice minister may release any prisoner who memorizes the Quran during his or her prison term. The release requires a recommendation for parole from the prison's director-general and a religious committee composed of the Sudan Scholars Organization and members of the Fiqh Council, which consults with the MGE to ensure decisions comply with Islamic legal regulations.

Under the law, a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman (though most Sudanese sharia schools of thought advise that the non-Muslim women must be "people of the book," i.e. either Christian or Jewish). A Muslim woman, however, legally may only marry a Muslim man. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim man may be charged with adultery.

Separate family courts exist for Muslims and non-Muslims to address personal status issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody, according to their religion. By law, in custody dispute cases where one parent is Muslim and the other is Christian, courts grant custody to the Muslim parent if there is any concern that the non-Muslim parent will raise the child in a religion other than Islam.

According to Islamic personal status laws, Christians (including children) may not inherit assets from a Muslim.

Government offices and businesses are closed on Friday for prayers and follow an Islamic workweek of Sunday to Thursday. The law requires employers to give Christian employees two hours off on Sundays for religious activity. Leave from work is also granted to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays.

An interministerial committee, which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the NISS, and in some cases Military

Intelligence, must approve foreign clergy and other foreigners seeking a residency permit.

The INC's bill of rights says all rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties, covenants, and instruments ratified by the country are integral parts of the INC's bill of rights.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

There were reports of authorities detaining Muslims, including an imam, and arresting, intimidating and detaining Christian clergy and church members on religious grounds, denying permits for the construction of churches, closing or demolishing existing churches and church schools, censoring religious materials and leaders, and restricting non-Muslim religious groups and missionaries from operating in or entering the country

According to human rights activists, Public Order police and courts charged women with and convicted them of "indecent dress." Credible sources reported that women were fined and lashed accordingly on a daily basis in Khartoum for wearing pants and other dress considered indecent by of Public Order police. On June 19, 19 women were reportedly convicted in Khartoum East Court and fined 300 Sudanese pounds (SDG) (\$42) each for "indecent dress," although it is unclear what they were wearing when arrested. In November three men and three women were playing board games in a public place when they were arrested for "indecent dress" and released after they signed a pledge they would not dress indecently again.

International and domestic human rights observers continued to express concern that 2015 legal amendments widening the definition of apostasy targeted and discriminated against smaller Muslim groups, especially Shia, whose approaches to Islam differ from the Sunni majority. For Muslim minorities, such as Shia or Quranist groups who are not part of the mainstream of Islam adopted by the state, many followers reported needing to keep a low profile regarding their places of worship, events, and gatherings.

In July the NISS arrested Imam Yousif Abdullah Abaker following an Eid al-Fitr sermon in Al Geneina in West Darfur State. In the sermon he criticized the performance of the central and state governments and held them accountable for the loss of lives in Darfur and throughout the country. Dr. Abdullah Khalil, the then-Wali (Governor) of West Darfur State, issued an administrative order to ban the imam from the state for nine months. As of the end of the year, Abaker was released; however, the governor of West Darfur State issued an exile order prohibiting Abaker's return. Abaker reportedly planned to file a constitutional case against the governor.

In August authorities charged Czech religious worker Peter Jasek, Sudanese Church of Christ pastors Kowa Shamal and Hassan Abdelrahim, and Darfuri student Abdelmoneim Abdumaula with eight crimes, including espionage and "warring against the state." The men were charged for reportedly donating money they said was to fund medical treatments for Ali Omer, who was injured during antigovernment demonstrations in 2013, and for interviewing and taking pictures of Christians who said they were persecuted in the Nuba Mountains and Darfur. Authorities said the donated money was for funding rebel movements and that the defendants interviewed and took pictures without prior permission from the government. Authorities also said Jasek illegally entered Sudan via South Sudan to do this. Two of the eight charges carry the death penalty. According to *Al-Yom al-Tali*, an independent Arabic newspaper, police arrested Jasek at Khartoum Airport while trying to leave the country with photos and documentation of abuses against Sudanese Muslims who converted to Christianity.

At trial, prosecutors reportedly said that Jasek had been the leader of this effort. They submitted a laptop reportedly confiscated from Jasek, which they said had voice recordings of interviews between Jasek and people who said they were victims of

persecution. According to the prosecutor, Abdelrahim and Jasek met at a November 2015 religious conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where Jasek arranged to enter the country illegally. According to Christian NGOs, Abdelrahim presented Omer's case to Jasek at the conference and Jasek reportedly subsequently donated to Omer. Jasek and other defendants were arrested in December 2015, were transferred multiple times to various NISS detention facilities with no reasons given, and were being held in Al Huda Prison with their trial ongoing as of the end of the year. According to religious organizations, Shamal had been conditionally released in 2015 and told to report daily to the NISS, but was re-arrested in May. Shamal was again released in late December after charges against him were dropped due to insufficient evidence. SPECS activist Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta, also arrested in connection with the Addis Ababa conference, was released in May and never charged.

In September defense lawyers for two South Sudanese pastors, Reverend Yat Michael Ruot Puk and Reverend Peter Yen Reith, submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court to challenge the Court of Appeals' 2015 decision to retry the pastors for charges including treason, espionage, and undermining the constitution. In 2015, authorities had arrested and tried the men, convicted them of lesser crimes, and subsequently released them. Upon release, the men fled the country and did not return.

In September the legal defense team that defended Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag in an apostasy case brought against her in 2014 submitted in absentia an appeal to the Constitutional Court to challenge the constitutionality of the charge of apostasy, which the lawyers said was primarily a religious – and not legal – concept. In 2014, charges against Ishag were dropped based on her state of mental well-being, and not based on the unconstitutionality of apostasy; she subsequently left the country.

On April 3, police arrested a woman and her family for apostasy after a Quranic school reported her family to the police. The substance of the school's allegations was unknown. The case did not reach the courts, but had not yet been dismissed at year's end. On April 5, the woman was released on bail and charges against her husband and three children (ages four, five, and six) dropped, although charges remained against the woman.

In February a judge ordered Isheikh Mohamed Ali Kadod to be assessed for mental illness following his conversion from Islam to Christianity. Authorities formally filed apostasy charges against Kadod in November 2015 after his father expressed concerns about his conversion, but it was uncertain who lodged the complaint. In accordance with court orders, the authorities went to Kadod's home and questioned his father about his mental health. The judge dismissed the case after Kadod's father asserted he was suffering from mental health issues.

Court proceedings against 25 people charged with apostasy in 2015 for questioning the authority of the *hadiths* were postponed in December 2015 until February, when the courts released the defendants, with the charges against them remaining pending. As of the end of the year, the defendants remained free on bail.

On March 13-14, NISS authorities arrested Pastors Yamani Abraham and Philemon Hassan Harrata of the Bahri Evangelical Church. They released Abraham on March 14 and Harrata on March 15.

On March 21, NISS officers reportedly detained Reverend Ayoub Tilyat Koko, the head of the Sudan Church of Christ in Omdurman. According to news reports, NISS did not provide a reason for the arrest and refused to say where they were taking him. He was later released, but was required to report to NISS offices on request.

Security authorities imposed sanctions on imams, ranging from stern official warnings to arrest and detention, for those accused of making anti-government statements, inciting hatred, advocating violence, or espousing "*takfirist* ideology," which considers other Muslims who do not follow a prescribed form of Islam as apostates.

In August the minister of guidance and endowments announced in a press conference the ministry would begin to prevent the delivery of sermons and homilies in markets and public places. Monitoring of markets and public places by police continued

through year's end, although no arrests were reported. Human rights observers decried the decision as a further restriction on free speech. Some Sufi leaders, however, welcomed the new policy as a way to curb regular inflammatory speeches by Wahhabi imams in public places, which they said often incited violence. The *Al-Sudani* newspaper reported that the minister said "destructive ideologies ha[d] entered the country through religious forums and posed a serious security threat," and that the country has many mosques, making it unnecessary to preach in public places. To support his point, the minister said 137 Sudanese individuals had joined extremist organizations such as Boko Haram and ISIS and that there had been 181 criminal cases of clashes due to inflammatory language between Wahhabi and Sufi groups.

There were reports government security services closely monitored mosques.

Prisons provided prayer spaces for Muslims. Some prisons, such as the Women's Prison in Omdurman, had dedicated areas for Christian observance. Christian clergy held services in prisons, but access was irregular.

The government often stated it did not have non-Muslim teachers available to teach Christian courses in public schools. Some public schools excused non-Muslims from Islamic education classes. Some private schools, including Christian schools, received government-provided Muslim teachers to teach Islamic subjects, but non-Muslim students were not required to attend those classes.

According to various church representatives, the government skewed its decisions on permit issuance towards mosques. Some churches reported they were less willing to apply for land permits or to construct churches given the government's previous repeated denials. The government attributed its denial of permits to the churches not meeting government population density parameters and zoning plans. Local parishioners reported that, compared to Islamic institutions, Christian places of worship were disproportionately affected by zoning changes, closures, and demolitions. The government said places of worship that were demolished or closed lacked proper land permits or institutional registration. The government stated mosques, churches, schools, hospitals, and residences were all affected equally by the urban planning projects.

The authorities reportedly demolished two churches (one Catholic and one Presbyterian) in Soba County of Khartoum State in December, stating the churches were on publicly-owned land.

In December the government issued a written notice to the Soba County Sudan Church of Christ stating it had no legal right to the land on which the church was built in 1986. The Sudanese Council of Churches (SCC) and lawyers appealed on behalf of the churches. At year's end, Soba County Sudan Church of Christ had not been demolished.

In July authorities in East Nile State ordered officials overseeing land matters to issue demolition notices to 25 churches in the state. At year's end, none of the churches had yet been demolished.

In July authorities gave three churches in Haj Yousif in Khartoum State notice of imminent demolition, saying the churches had improper land registration documents. Residents of the area reported that multiple mosques and a government-run school within the same vicinity as the churches were not given similar notices of imminent demolition. Pro bono legal representatives of the churches and the SCC appealed to the MGE on behalf of the churches, which all had informal documents showing the government allocated land to them for rent in the 1990s. As of the end of the year, the churches had not been demolished and the church's legal representative brought a civil case against the government, which has not yet been heard by the administrative court.

Neither the Evangelical Lutheran Church nor the Sudanese Church of Christ in Omdurman, which were demolished in October 2015, received compensation as of the end of the year. According to authorities, the government would provide financial compensation and new land in another area of Khartoum to the Evangelical Lutheran Church and other institutions affected by rezoning.

Evangelical Protestant groups cited as longstanding problems the continued sale of churches' land to investors and what they said

was an ongoing lack of protection by the government for clergy and Christian parishioners arrested and detained.

As of the end of the year, the government had not implemented a 2015 court decision stipulating that only a SPECS-appointed entity may govern the land affairs of the SPECS Bahri Evangelical Church in Khartoum, and not the government-appointed Evangelical Community Council, which continued to sell the church's land to private investors throughout the year.

In a related event on July 7, police arrested 17 individuals for protesting the Evangelical Community Council's sale of the SPECS-owned Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Training School, part of the same land dispute in which a court ruled in favor of SPECS in 2015. Police subsequently released three of them, reportedly upon recognizing them as members of the council. The general prosecutor initially charged the other 14 with disturbing the peace and ordered their release on bail. Local police challenged instructions to release the group but released them three days later. On July 10, a judge found 13 of them guilty of disturbing the peace and fined them 300 SDG (\$42) each. In addition to disturbing the peace, the fourteenth defendant was found guilty of obstructing the police and fined an additional 500 SDG (\$70). Two of the convicted were members of the clergy, one was the former headmistress of the school whom the government had forcibly removed, and the remaining were senior members of SPECS. Parishioners said the arrests were a continuation of government interference in church affairs and reported that the Evangelical Community Council held elections in April and pledged to continue selling off parts of the church's property. As of the end of the year, court orders cancelling investors' claim to church property sold by the council were still pending, portions of the church remained closed, and the church had not received any compensation for demolitions in 2015.

According to media, NISS authorities raided the SPECS-owned Evangelical Basic School in Madani, Al Jazirah State on three separate occasions: September 5, October 4, and October 24. On September 5, police reportedly presented documents ordering the school be handed over to the MGE and temporarily arrested the school's headmaster, Reverend Samuel Suleiman Angelo, and 12 teachers, accusing them of supporting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains. Suleiman strongly denied the charge. Following the October 4 raid, authorities arrested and detained for four days Suleiman, Reverend Ismail Zakaria, and seven teachers for attempting to prevent the seizure of the school. Following the October 24 raid, school officials wrote a letter to the government requesting it reconsider its decision to close the school. After hearings on November 7 and 8, the Appeal Court for Administrative Affairs cancelled an order by the Madani commissioner calling for the closure of the school and appointment of a Muslim headmaster.

As of year's end, the case of the government's closure of the Khartoum Cultural Center of the Pentecostal Church in 2014 remained pending before the Constitutional Court. The government maintained control of the property and church leaders were only permitted to use the center for administrative purposes.

The Church of Jesus Christ in Aliza, Khartoum North, continued to seek restitution for the government's demolition of its church in 2014 due to what the MGE said was lack of proper land permits and registration. According to the SCC, the church had not received compensation and authorities prevented them from constructing a new church.

The government restricted some religiously based political parties, including the Republican Brothers Party.

Government officials continued to state Islamic principles should inform official policies and often pointed to sharia as the basis for Sudan's legal framework. President Bashir and other senior figures frequently emphasized the Islamic majority of the country.

The government occasionally referred to rebel groups as "secular" or "anti-Islamic."

In September the government engaged civil society and political parties in a Community Dialogue, a forum for participation from civil society and political parties running parallel to the National Dialogue to consider future political reforms, including whether changes to the INC should be secular or based on sharia. Authorities recurrently extended the National Dialogue from January to

September, to allow for more participation from opposition groups. Some participating groups argued for strengthening the role of Islam in government and politics, while other groups called for greater secularism. Many evangelical Christian groups and other civil society groups reported not being included in either dialogue.

The MGE said decisions regarding the approval and oversight of the administration of religious institutions should be considered a federal (not state) competency, in order to better control the activities of violent extremist groups. Some Salafist groups reported plans to file a case against the MGE regarding the issue.

The government restricted non-Muslim religious groups from operating or entering the country and continued to monitor activities and censor material published by religious institutions. The MGE said it granted a limited number of Christian missionary groups permission to engage in humanitarian activities and promote Muslim-Christian cooperation.

Some Christian churches reported authorities required them to pay or negotiate taxes on items such as vehicles, even though the government had previously granted them or their humanitarian institutions tax-exempt status.

Leading officials from various churches reported the government refused to grant, or delayed renewing, work and residency visas to church employees of foreign origin, including missionaries and clergy, or to individuals it thought would proselytize in public places. This reportedly had a particularly negative impact on the Catholic Church whose clergy are mostly of foreign origin, while most clergy of other Christian denominations are ethnically Sudanese. The government only granted residence permits with less than a year's validity. According to Catholic Church officials, the government tightened restrictions on the entry of foreign clergy during the year. In rare cases when entry visas were issued, clergy often waited up to seven months before the government granted them residency permits. Until issuance, clergy were required to pay a 40 SDG (\$5.60) fine for every day they were not in residency status, approximately 8,400 SDG (\$1,180) over seven months.

The government closely scrutinized those suspected of proselytizing and used administrative rationales, or other aspects of the law such as immigration status, to either deport or exert financial pressure on them. As a result, most non-Muslim groups refrained from public proselytizing.

A small number of Christian politicians, the majority of whom were members of the Coptic Church, continued to hold seats in the government. Evangelical Christian groups said that the MGE-appointed director of church affairs remained a Muslim, reporting that his policies and interests were often not in alignment with those of evangelical churches.

The government allowed the SCC, an ecumenical body representing 12 member churches in Sudan and affiliated with the World Council of Churches, to engage in civic education, advocacy, peace and reconciliation, relief, and development services, either directly or through its member churches.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Government officials reported tensions between some Muslim groups. Muslims and non-Muslims said a small, growing, and sometimes vocal minority of Salafist groups continued to be a concern to them on religious grounds and because some advocated violence. Some groups said that, by allowing the largest of these Salafist groups, the Ansari al-Sunna, to operate without much surveillance or interference, the government gave tacit approval to the organization's views.

The local newspaper *Al-Sayha* reported imams and clerics launched severe criticism against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), an armed rebel movement based in South Kordofan, which militarily controls the area where the predominantly Christian population of the Nuba Mountains resides. Imams and clerics reportedly described the movement as a "claw for Zionism seeking to destroy Islam." In November an imam said in a Friday sermon that the SPLM-N is "fighting for apostasy."

Another imam said the SPLM-N is “calling for the disablement of Allah’s rule” in the country and demanded that its “voice, which mocks sharia, be silenced.”

Individual Muslims and Christians reported generally good relationships between Muslims and Christians at the societal level and stated that instances of intolerance or discrimination by nongovernment entities were generally considered as isolated incidents. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. Observers stated that societal tensions based on religious beliefs figured more prominently among different Muslim groups than across different religious groups.

The Sudan Inter-Religious Council, a registered nonprofit, nonpolitical organization consisting of a body of scholars, half of whom are Muslim and half Christian, was mandated to advise the MGE and sought to encourage interfaith dialogue. During the year, however, the Council was mainly inactive.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In high-level meetings, U.S. Department of State officials, including the U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, encouraged the government to respect religious freedom and protect the rights of minority religious groups. The Special Envoy raised in high-level government meetings the nine-month detention of Hassan Abdelrahim and other clergy by the NISS without charges and urged the government to grant a fair and speedy trial. Government officials responded it was a criminal case, requiring the trial to be completed just as any other.

U.S. embassy representatives stressed respect for religious freedom was crucial to improved bilateral relations. In March the Charge d’Affaires met with the state minister from the MGE to discuss the general status of religious freedom and review the government’s actions relevant to religious freedom throughout the year. The Charge d’Affaires urged the minister to repeal apostasy and blasphemy laws and expressed concern about specific cases that had come to the embassy’s attention, especially the cases of detained clergy, the enforcement of public order laws, and the demolition of churches.

In a meeting in September the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised concerns with the undersecretary of the MFA about ongoing cases, and underscored U.S. commitment to engaging with the government to improve religious freedom.

Embassy officials met regularly with imams and Sufi clerics, and clergy and parishioners of Catholic and Protestant churches to hear their views on the religious freedom situation in the country. Embassy officials attended religious ceremonies of different groups and underscored the importance of religious tolerance in regular meetings with leaders of Muslim and Christian groups. U.S. government representatives closely monitored and attended many of the legal proceedings concerning religious organizations and religious leaders. In one example, embassy officials regularly attended weekly hearings from August to November in the trial of Peter Jasek and associates, Pastors Kowa Shamal and Hassan Abdelrahim, and human rights activist Abdelmoneim Abdumaula. Embassy officials also attended ongoing proceedings for the 25 Muslims charged with apostasy in 2015 and released on bail in February.

Embassy officials kept in close contact with NGOs, civil society representatives, and journalists to gather their perspectives on religious freedom and to receive updates about ongoing cases.

The embassy regularly utilized its social media outlets to share articles and messaging related to religious tolerance and freedom. Often the messaging highlighted religious diversity in the United States and efforts by local communities to remain inclusive and maintain an open dialogue. In addition, the embassy issued statements in observance of both Christian and Islamic holidays.

Since 1999, Sudan has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. On October 31, the Secretary of State re-designated Sudan as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied

the designation: the restriction on making certain appropriated funds available for assistance to the Government of Sudan in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, currently set forth in section 7042(j) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (Div. K, Pub. L. 113-76), and any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as this provision, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Swaziland

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to worship, alone or in community with others, and to change religion or belief. Although the law requires new religious groups to register, unregistered groups were able to operate freely. Some traditional chiefs did not allow the operation of, or closed currently operating, businesses in their jurisdictions by individuals who appeared to be Muslim. Muslim communities and the media reported plainclothes police officers attended and monitored Friday prayer sessions in mosques. During a people's parliament held at a royal residence, male Rastafarians who wanted to enter to participate in the discussions were required to uncover their heads, which they said was against their religious beliefs.

Muslim communities and the media reported negative views of Islam in society. The media reported incidents of offensive speech against Islam by members of the Christian clergy. Many non-Muslims declined to patronize Muslim-owned businesses such as eating establishments.

The U.S. Ambassador and other U. S. embassy representatives met with religious groups and engaged with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom concerns.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.5 million (July 2016 estimate). Religious leaders estimate 90 percent of the population is Christian, approximately 2 percent is Muslim (of which most are not ethnically Swazi), and the remainder belongs to other religious groups, including those with native African beliefs. According to anecdotal reports, approximately 40 percent of the population practices Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, (some adherents of which self-identify as evangelical Christians), while another 20 percent is Roman Catholic. There are also Anglicans, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and small Jewish and Bahai communities. Zionism is widely practiced in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to worship, alone or in community with others, and to change religion or belief. These rights may be limited by laws that are "reasonably required" in the interest of defense, or public safety, order, morality, or health, or protecting the rights of others.

The constitution affords unwritten traditional laws and customs, which are interpreted by traditional courts, equal status with codified laws, and prohibits the parliament and national courts from changing or regulating them.

The law requires religious groups to register with the government. In order to register, Christian groups must apply through one of the country's three umbrella religious bodies (the League of Churches, Swaziland Conference of Churches, or Council of Swaziland Churches) for a recommendation, which is routinely granted, according to church leaders. The application process requires the group to provide its constitution, membership, and the physical location of the organization, along with the umbrella body's recommendation, to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, which registers the organization. For indigenous religious groups and non-Christian religious organizations, authorities consider proof of a religious leader, a congregation, and a place of worship as sufficient grounds to grant registration. Registered religious groups are exempt from taxation, but contributions to these groups are not tax deductible.

Religious groups are required to obtain government permission for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and must obtain the appropriate chief's and the chief's advisory council's permission for new buildings in rural areas. In some rural communities, designated special committees allocate land to religious groups.

Religious instruction is mandatory in primary school and is incorporated into the daily morning assembly. Religion is an elective subject in secondary school. Although schools teach religion predominantly from a Christian perspective, the Ministry of Education includes a component on other religious groups in the curriculum. The constitution provides religious groups the right to establish and operate private schools and to provide religious instruction for their students without interference from government.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Muslim communities and the media reported plainclothes police officers attended and monitored Friday prayer sessions in mosques.

During a people's parliament held at a royal residence, male Rastafarians who wanted to participate in the discussions and make submissions on issues of national interest were required to uncover their heads in order to enter the residence, which they stated was against their religious beliefs.

In August the *Times of Swaziland* reported that a presiding judicial officer ordered a defendant to remove a pin from his jacket symbolizing his affiliation with the Zion Christian Church. After the defendant removed the pin, the officer allowed him to take the witness stand and proceeded with the trial.

Religious leaders said the government protected the right of Muslim workers to close businesses in order to attend Friday afternoon prayer sessions at mosques despite the government mandated business operating hours. Businesses owned by members of the Bahai community were allowed to close shops in observance of Bahai religious holidays. Public schools, however, did not allow Muslim pupils early departure to attend Friday prayers.

According to local religious leaders, unwritten traditional laws and customs allowed approximately 360 chiefs and their councilors to restrict some rights of minority religious groups within their jurisdictions if the chiefs determined the groups' practices conflicted with tradition and culture. Some chiefs continued to state they would not allow the operation of businesses in their jurisdictions by individuals who appeared to be associated with Islam.

According to religious leaders and civil society organizations, only Christian religious youth clubs were permitted to operate in

public schools by the schools' administration. Other non-Christian religious clubs were prohibited from meeting in the schools. The voluntary Christian clubs conducted daily prayer services in many public schools. The schools' administration permitted the Christian clubs to raise funds and at times the clubs received funding from the school or from the general public.

Non-Christian groups reported the government provided some preferential benefits to Christians, such as free transportation to religious activities for Zionists and airtime on state television and radio for Christians, which the government did not make available to them. Government-owned television and radio stations broadcast daily morning and evening Christian programming. The government provided each of the three Christian umbrella religious bodies with free airtime to broadcast daily religious services on the state-run radio station. Non-Christian religious groups stated they did not receive airtime despite their repeated calls for inclusion in state-run television and radio programs.

The monarchy, and by extension the government, aligned itself with Christian faith-based groups and also supported many Christian activities. The king, the queen mother, and other members of the royal family commonly attended Zionist programs, including Good Friday and Easter weekend services, where the host church usually invited the king to preach. Official government programs generally opened with a Christian prayer and several government ministers held Christian prayer vigils, which civil servants were expected to attend, to address social issues such as crime and increases in traffic accidents.

In April the government indicated its intent to regulate the operation of religious groups following a 2014 parliamentary call for a national policy to control the rapidly growing number of religious groups in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders and the media reported instances when members of the larger Christian groups discriminated against non-Christians, particularly in rural areas. Some Christians reportedly declined to patronize Muslim-owned businesses such as eating establishments. According to media reports, during the celebration of Eid al-Adha, members of the Muslim community extended an open invitation to join them and receive free meat as part of the festival, but many Christian leaders called upon their members to avoid the festival and the offered meat.

Muslim communities and the media reported negative views of Islam in society. Some individuals associated Islam with terrorist organizations such as ISIS (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or Boko Haram and therefore any activity conducted by Muslims was viewed with suspicion and disdain. The media reported incidents of offensive speech against Islam by members of the Christian clergy.

Prominent religious leaders from across the country met in May for the second annual meeting of the World Alliance of Religions' Peace Office. The assembly included leaders representing Judaism, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Christianity, and Islam. Various participants stated the meeting helped them better understand other religious groups through dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador hosted a discussion focused on freedom of religion which brought together members of government and civil society from both religious and nonreligious organizations. The participants, mainly those following Christian or traditional beliefs, addressed the issue of state involvement in religion and implied that there was insufficient separation between religion and state.

Embassy representatives also met with leaders of different faith-based organizations, such as the imam from the Islamic Center and members of an organization known as the Swaziland Concerned Church Leaders, to discuss their concerns with respect to religious

freedom.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy personnel attended a tree-planting session organized by the Islamic Center and engaged in discussions on religious tolerance. The Islamic Center stated it hosted this event to foster a positive relationship with the embassy and encourage more interaction. The discussion focused on the purpose of the center, which is to educate children in the Muslim faith, and on the challenges the center has encountered through its opening and operation.

Tanzania

Executive Summary

The constitutions of the union government and of the semiautonomous government in Zanzibar both prohibit religious discrimination and provide for freedom of religious choice. Three individuals were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the arson of a church in Kagera. A Christian bishop in Dar es Salaam was arrested and accused of sedition for speaking on political matters from the pulpit. The church's license was withheld while police continued to investigate at year's end. The president and prime minister, along with local government officials, emphasized peace and religious tolerance through dialogue with religious leaders. Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa addressed an interfaith iftar in July, noting his appreciation for religious leaders using their place of worship to preach tolerance, peace, and harmony.

In May 15 masked assailants bombarded and attacked individuals at the Rahmani Mosque, killing three people, including the imam, and injuring several others. Arsonists set fire to three churches within four months in the Kagera Region, where church burning has been a recurring concern of religious leaders. The police had not arrested any suspects by the end of the year. Civil society groups continued to promote peaceful interactions and religious tolerance.

The U.S. embassy began implementing a program to counter violent extremism narratives and strengthen the framework for religious tolerance. A Department of State official visited the country to participate in a conference of Anglican leaders on issues of religious freedom and relations between Christians and Muslims. Embassy officers continued to advocate for religious peace and tolerance in meetings with religious leaders in Zanzibar.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 52 million (July 2016 estimate). A 2010 Pew Forum survey estimates approximately 61 percent of the population is Christian, 35 percent Muslim, and 4 percent other religious groups. A separate 2010 Pew Forum Report estimates over half of the population practices elements of African traditional religions in their daily lives. There are no domestic surveys covering religious affiliation. Local observers, however, state there are roughly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims in the country.

On the mainland, large Muslim communities are concentrated in coastal areas, with some Muslim minorities located inland in urban areas. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Protestants (including Pentecostal Christian groups), Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other groups include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, animists, and those who did not express a religious preference. Zanzibar's 1.3 million residents are 99 percent Muslim, according to a U.S. government estimate, of whom two-thirds are Sunni, according to a 2012 Pew Forum report. The remainder consists of several Shia groups, mostly of Asian descent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitutions of the union government and Zanzibar both provide for equality regardless of religion, prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, and stipulate freedom of conscience or faith and choice in matters of religion, including the freedom to change one's faith. The union government constitution allows these rights to be limited by law for purposes such as protecting the rights of others; promoting the national interest; and defense, safety, peace, morality, and health. The Zanzibar constitution allows the rights to be limited by law if such a limitation is "necessary and agreeable in the democratic system" and does not limit the "foundation" of the right or bring "more harm" to society.

The law prohibits religious groups from registering as political parties. In order to register as a political party, an entity cannot use religion as a basis to approve membership, nor can the promotion of religion be a policy of that entity.

The law prohibits any person from taking any action or making statements with the intent of insulting the religious beliefs of another person. Anyone committing such an offense is liable to a year's imprisonment.

On the mainland, secular laws govern Christians and Muslims in both criminal and civil cases. In family-related cases involving inheritance, marriage, divorce, and the adoption of minors, the law also recognizes customary practices, which could include religious practices. In such cases, some Muslims choose to consult religious leaders in lieu of bringing a court case.

Zanzibar, while also subject to the union constitution, has its own president, court system, and legislature. Muslims in Zanzibar have the option of bringing cases to a civil or *qadi* (Islamic court or judge) court for matters of divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other issues covered by Islamic law. All cases tried in Zanzibar courts, except those involving Zanzibari constitutional matters and sharia, may be appealed to the Union Court of Appeals on the mainland. Decisions of Zanzibar's *qadi* courts may be appealed to a special court consisting of the Zanzibar chief justice and five other sheikhs. The President of Zanzibar appoints the chief *qadi*, who oversees the *qadi* courts and is recognized as the senior Islamic scholar responsible for interpreting the Quran. There are no *qadi* courts on the mainland.

Religious groups must register with the registrar of societies at the Ministry of Home Affairs on the mainland and with the Office of the Registrar General on Zanzibar. Registration is required by law on both the mainland and in Zanzibar, but the penalties for failing to comply with this requirement are not stated in the law.

To register, religious groups must provide the names of at least 10 members, a written constitution, resumes of their leaders, and a letter of recommendation from the district commissioner. Such groups can then list individual congregations, which do not need separate registration. In addition, Muslim groups registering on the mainland must provide a letter of approval from the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA), a government body. Muslim groups registering in Zanzibar must provide a letter of approval from the mufti, the government's official liaison to the Muslim community. Christian groups in Zanzibar may register directly with the registrar general.

On the mainland, BAKWATA elects the mufti. On Zanzibar, the President of Zanzibar appoints the mufti, who serves as a leader of the Muslim community and as a public servant assisting with local governmental affairs. The Mufti of Zanzibar nominally approves all Islamic activities and supervises all mosques on Zanzibar. The mufti also approves religious lectures by visiting Islamic clergy and supervises the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar.

Public schools may teach religion, but it is not a part of the official national curriculum. School administration or parent and teacher associations must approve such classes, which are taught on an occasional basis by parents or volunteers. Public school registration forms must specify a child's religious affiliation so administrators can assign students to the appropriate religion class if one is offered. Students may also choose to opt out of religious studies. Private schools may teach religion, though it is not required, and these schools generally follow the national educational curriculum unless they receive a waiver from the Ministry of Education for a separate curriculum. In public schools, students are allowed to wear the hijab but not the *niqab*.

The government does not designate religious affiliation on passports or records of vital statistics. Police reports must state religious affiliation if an individual will have to give sworn testimony. Applications for medical care must specify religious affiliation so that any specific religious customs may be observed. The law requires the government to record the religious affiliation of every prisoner and provide facilities for worship for prisoners.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In September three suspects were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for arson in the case of the 2015 burning of an Evangelical Lutheran Church in the western Kagera Region. Little progress was made in several other cases of arson in the region.

In July Bishop Gwajima of the Pentecostal Glory of Christ Tanzania Church in Dar es Salaam was arrested on the basis of sedition and questioned by the police. The police reportedly arrested Gwajima after he spoke from the pulpit on political issues involving the leadership of Tanzania's ruling party in June. Police released the bishop after four hours, but his church's license was suspended until the end of the investigation. Bishop's Gwajima's followers (approximately 10,000 people) operated under the licenses of other churches. The Pentecostal Pastor Fellowship of Tanzania clerics revoked his membership and urged the Ministry of Home Affairs to deregister the bishop. As of the end of the year, the investigation was ongoing.

By year's end, there had not been a hearing on the 2013 case of the leaders of the Association of Islamic Mobilization and Propagation (known as Uamsho, meaning "Awakening" in Swahili), a Muslim community development organization. Twenty-two of the group's leaders were arrested in 2013 and charged with terrorism in connection with a number of incidents around the country, including at least two attacks on religious leaders. The authorities subsequently charged additional suspects in the case. No suspects received bail and all remained in custody. The government's appeal of a 2014 High Court ruling that the Kisutu Magistrates' Court had jurisdiction to hear the case was still pending. Some of the accused appeared in court during the year, but there were no new developments in the case.

There were no new developments in the case of a suspect arrested in 2013 for alleged involvement in a clash between Muslims and Christians near Mwanza that led to the death of a pastor, injuries of multiple persons, and property damage. Similarly there were no new developments in the case of a 2013 acid attack against a Catholic priest in Zanzibar.

Between July 2015 and March 2016, the registrar of societies on the mainland received 102 registration requests from religious groups. The registrar approved 26, rejected 13, and 55 were pending at year's end. Most of the rejections were reportedly because of missing information, according to the official record. Determinations on complete applications were often made in a matter of months, but if the registrar required further information, the follow-up process could take years. There were reports that some religious organizations operated for more than four years without full registration. Registrations in Zanzibar were generally quick, often taking no more than a week.

Over the course of the year, media sources reported President John Magufuli attended services at four different churches and one

mosque. During these visits, he asked for religious leaders to preach peace in the country. He also called for peace and religious tolerance at an iftar he hosted. Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa addressed an interfaith iftar program in July, noting his appreciation for religious leaders using their places of worship to preach tolerance, peace, and harmony.

In August the Regional Commissioner of the Shinyanga Region assembled religious leaders in the area to discuss peace and security. Leaders represented Christian and Muslim congregations and stated they would like the government to conduct a dialogue with religious leaders.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 18, 15 masked assailants stormed the Rahmani Mosque in the Mwanza region with explosives, machetes, and axes. The assailants killed three people, including Imam Ferouz Ismail Elias, and injured several others. Media sources reported the attackers were motivated by the concurrent arrests of Muslims in the area. The Mwanza regional police commander reported three people were arrested in connection with the attack. Investigations into the attack were ongoing at the end of the year.

From February to May, arsonists burned down three churches in the Kagera Region, including the Roman Catholic church in Nyarwele, a Tanzanian Assemblies of God church, and a Pentecostal Assemblies of God church. No group claimed responsibility for any of the fires as of the end of the year. The attacks followed a series of arson attacks in the region in previous years. According to the secretary of the Bukoba Pastors Fellowship, arsonists burned at least 13 churches in Kagera between 2013 and 2015.

According to media reports, the Kagera Region experienced heightened levels of religious tension in recent years. The sources attributed the tension to the recent growth in fundamentalist Muslim groups in the area.

In August arsonists attacked the home of a pastor of the Calvary Assemblies of God church in Kidimuni. Media sources reported the arsonists included violent extremists from outside the area with ties to local Muslims who objected to the pastor's evangelical work. The pastor stated he received leaflets at his door warning him to stop evangelizing. The pastor reported the incident to police patrolling the area following the attack.

On March 12, religious leaders from the mainland and Zanzibar took part in a meeting in Zanzibar organized by the Inter-Religious Council for Peace Tanzania (IRCPT) and UNESCO. At the meeting, participants resolved that religious leaders should be dissociated from politics and preach peace and religious tolerance during the Zanzibar election re-run that was held on March 20.

The Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) held two seminars during the year for bishops and imams on religious radicalization.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The embassy engaged government and security officials in discussions on the potential for religious issues to play a role in community unrest. To underscore themes of diversity and tolerance the embassy launched a program on countering violent extremism and promoting interfaith dialogue in the country. The program was designed to mitigate tensions between communities and address drivers of marginalization and religious tensions contributing to conditions that lead to violent extremism. Key objectives of the program include countering violent extremism and strengthening the country's legal and policy framework for religious tolerance.

In April a Department of State officer participated in a conference in Dar es Salaam convening Anglican leadership from Africa and North America. Participants at the conference discussed a variety of issues including religious freedom, relations between Christians and Muslims, and relations between the government and Anglican churches, especially those working in areas considered at-risk for community violence.

Embassy officials frequently held meetings with both Muslim and Christian religious leaders in Zanzibar and discussed interfaith dialogue and cooperation between Christian and Muslim communities to reduce social tensions in the islands.

Togo

Executive Summary

The constitution specifies the state is secular and protects the rights of all citizens to exercise their religious beliefs, consistent with the nation's laws. Religious groups other than Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims must register with the government. The procedure includes providing the religious credentials of the leadership, financial information, plans for religious facilities, and satisfying the government's ethical criteria. The Ministry of Territorial Administration (MTA) stated it did not approve pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because the draft legislation regarding religious freedom had not passed.

Occasional disputes among religious groups were frequently related to noise caused by religious celebrations, or competition for parishioners among churches. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common.

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officials provided literacy training to 300 imams in Muslim communities in the Central Region, which highlighted messages of peace and tolerance among all religions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.8 million (July 2016 estimate). According to a 2004 estimate by the University of Lome, the most recent data available, the population is 48 percent Christian, 33 percent traditional animist, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, and 5 percent followers of other religions. Roman Catholics are the largest Christian group at 28 percent, followed by Protestants at 10 percent, and other Christian denominations totaling 10 percent. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The 5 percent representing "other religions" includes Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Bahais, Hindus, and persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious practices. Reliable figures are difficult to obtain due to migration.

Christians live mainly in the southern part of the country while Muslim populations are predominately in the central and northern regions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the nation is a secular state and ensures equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of religion, respects all religious beliefs, and prohibits religious discrimination. It provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship, the free

exercise of religious belief, and the right of religious groups to organize themselves and carry out their activities consistent with the law, the rights of others, and public order.

The law does not recognize specific religions, but the government in practice recognizes Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam with their religious holidays observed as national holidays and religious leaders of these groups invited to government events. The law requires all other religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Official recognition as a religious association affords these groups the same rights as those afforded to the three recognized religions, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registering is not obligatory, but unregistered groups do not receive import duty exemptions or additional government benefits such as government-provided teachers for private schools.

Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA. A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, its leaders' religious credentials, a site use agreement and map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$240). Criteria for recognition include the authenticity of the religious leader's diploma and the government's assessment of the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Directorate of Religious Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition for religious groups applying for registration. The investigation and issuance of formal written authorization usually takes several years.

By law religious groups must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those likely to block city streets or involve loud ceremonies in residential areas.

The public school curriculum does not include religion classes. There are many Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools, to which the government assigns its own paid employees as additional teachers and staff. Other registered religious groups have the right to establish schools as long as they meet accreditation standards.

The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. Private religious radio stations are forbidden from airing political broadcasts.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The MTA stated it did not approve pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because draft legislation regarding religious freedom had not passed. The MTA presented the new regulation on worship practices to the Council of Ministers in September 2015. The government said it was drafted with a view to guaranteeing freedom of worship while respecting the communities in which religious groups were based. The council did not act on the proposal by the end of the year.

Unregistered religious groups were able to continue their religious activities while awaiting registration. The MTA continued to report religious groups faced obstacles such as obtaining building permits for places of worship. The ministry stated, however, this was not because they were religious groups but because applying for a building permit required at least a six-month waiting period for any applicant. Observers reported that officials routinely granted religious groups' requests for permission to conduct nighttime celebrations.

The government generally recognized Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic religious holidays as official national holidays. Only religious leaders from those three groups were invited to government events. For example, during the opening ceremony for the

October African Union Maritime Summit, the government invited leaders from these three groups to give opening prayers.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Directorate for Religious Affairs, disputes continued to erupt when new churches established themselves in neighborhoods, particularly those led by religious leaders from Nigeria. Local residents continued to state these congregations worshiped too loudly, and often late at night, using drums. The MTA continued to receive regular complaints about noise during the year, but was not able to provide specifics on any of the disputes or whether or how they were resolved. These complaints reportedly often focused on evangelical Protestant parishes, led by charismatic leaders who presided over services employing musical instruments and loud praying.

Members of different religious groups continued to invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Marriage between persons of different religious groups remained common.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to discuss religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, traditional chiefs, and civil society organizations. Embassy officials provided literacy training to 300 imams in the Central Region to strengthen their ability to become credible voices in their Muslim communities and to combat hardline messages from foreign clerics. The training highlighted messages of peace and tolerance among all religions.

Uganda

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates there shall be no state religion. It provides for freedom of belief and the right to practice and promote any religion, and to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious organization in a manner consistent with the constitution. The government requires religious groups to register. The government restricted activities of religious groups it defined as “cults” and arrested some members who refused to participate based on religious grounds in government immunization drives. On December 27 and 29, police raided two mosques, without advanced notice, to search for evidence related to the November killing of a Muslim cleric, and other unspecified criminal activity. Police stated the December 27 raid resulted in the discovery of arms and incriminating documents; however, a spokesperson for the group that runs the mosque accused the police of desecrating a place of worship, planting evidence, removing documents, and stealing approximately 505 million Ugandan shillings (\$14,000). The Inspector General of Police apologized for the December 29 raid, noting the police acted on false intelligence. The Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) accused the government of discriminatory hiring practices against Muslims for both senior and lower-level positions.

On November 26, two unknown assailants shot and killed a Muslim cleric who was also a Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) officer and his UPDF bodyguard in Kampala, after trailing his truck on a motorcycle. The police arrested and charged four clerics from a rival action of the Muslim Salafist Tabliq group for his killing. According to observers, many of the disputes within the Salafist Tabliq group, one of the country’s main Muslim factions, were financially or politically motivated. As of year’s end, the case was

ongoing.

The embassy brought together civil society and religious leaders to promote religious tolerance and diversity. The Ambassador issued Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr messages promoting religious tolerance via radio and television. The embassy also organized a U.S. study tour for eight religious leaders to explore the role of faith-based organizations in a diverse democracy.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38.3 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2014 national census, 39 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 32 percent Anglican, 14 percent Muslim, and 11 percent Pentecostal Christian. Other religious groups, which collectively constitute less than 5 percent of the population, include Seventh-day Adventists, adherents of indigenous beliefs, Baptists, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, and those with no religious affiliation. The UMSC estimates Muslims are closer to 25 percent of the population. The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Citizens and residents of Indian origin or descent are the largest non-African ethnic population and the Indian Association in Uganda reports the majority are Hindu. The Northern Region and West Nile Sub-Region are predominantly Roman Catholic, and the Iganga District in the Eastern Region has the highest percentage of Muslims. There is an indigenous Jewish community of approximately 2,000 people in and around the eastern town of Mbale.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and establishes there shall be no state religion. It provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and belief and the right to practice and promote any religion as well as to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organization in a manner consistent with the constitution. The constitution also stipulates the government may limit these rights by measures that are “reasonably justifiable for dealing with a state of emergency.” The constitution prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion.

The government requires religious groups to register to obtain legal entity status. The more established religious groups, such as the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches, and the UMSC, obtain legal status by registering under the on a one-time basis under new legislation enacted during the year. Upon the release of the new legislation, however, responsibility for the registration process shifted from the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ board for NGOs to the Department of Religious Affairs, under the Ministry of Ethics and Integrity. The Department of Religious Affairs has not yet provided public information about its registration process.

In accordance with the constitution, religious instruction in public schools is optional, and the curriculum surveys world religious beliefs. Private schools are free to offer religious instruction.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In May media sources reported police arrested, and later released without charge, 10 members of the Njiri Nkalu religious group in the Mayuge district for refusing to allow their children to participate in a government immunization program. The Njiri Nkalu

members said their religious beliefs prohibited them from participating. With police assistance, Ministry of Health officers forcibly entered Njiri Nkalu members' homes and immunized approximately 200 children. Local officials considered the Njiri Nkalu a cult. Government policy defined a cult as a system of religious worship, often with a charismatic leader, which indoctrinated members with "unorthodox or extremist" views, practices, or beliefs.

After midnight on December 27, without advanced notice or warning, police raided a Salafi mosque in Kampala and arrested 14 individuals for suspected involvement in the November 26 killing of Muslim cleric Sheikh Mohammed Kiggundu, as well as other unspecified criminal activity. A spokesperson of the group that runs the mosque – the Jamaat Dawata Salafiya faction of the Tabliq group – accused the police of desecrating a place of worship, planting incriminating evidence, removing documents, and stealing approximately 50.5 million Ugandan shillings (\$14,000). The police said they found arms in the mosque and documents revealing unspecified criminal activity. The 14 individuals had not been released at year's end.

On December 29, the police raided another mosque at approximately eight pm, detained worshippers in the venue until 11:00 a.m., and arrested 13 people.

Media reported in April that police in Masaka District cancelled a planned public prayer rally by Christian evangelical groups after a group of Muslim imams complained the evangelical preachers insulted Islam by publicly reading the Quran, which the clerics stated Islam prohibits. The police also arrested, but later released the same day without charge, Christian preacher Paul Serunjogi, who was one of the organizers of the prayer rally, after Muslim clerics accused him of provoking Muslims.

The UMSC accused the government of discriminatory hiring practices against Muslims, stating Muslims were not receiving fair consideration for senior positions and filled only a small number of low-level positions. UMSC reported Muslims comprised less than 10 percent of the total staff in most government agencies, considerably less than what the UMSC stated was their percentage of the population.

The UMSC also stated the government manipulated the 2014 National Population and Housing Census. In May a spokesperson of the UMSC rejected the approximately 14 percent Muslim population recorded in the census and accused officials of manipulating the statistics to justify what the spokesperson called "marginalization of Muslims."

The UMSC reported the government reopened the madrassahs and mosques it had closed in 2015 based on allegations of terrorism and possible links to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On November 26, two unknown assailants shot and killed a Muslim cleric who was also a Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) officer and his UPDF bodyguard in Kampala, after trailing his truck on a motorcycle. A week before the killing, the cleric, Major Muhammad Kiggundu, said on a local FM station that clerics from a rival faction of his Tabliq group had accused him of falsely implicating them in previous killings of Muslim clerics, and sent him death threats. The police arrested and charged four clerics from a rival Muslim faction for his killing. According to observers, the conflict between the factions was largely politically and financially motivated, and the motivations included a public dispute over management rights to a lucrative commercial property in Kampala owned by the Tabliq group. As of year's end, the case was ongoing.

Between 2012 and 2015 gunmen killed at least nine Muslim leaders, with most of the shootings at close range. The government stated the ADF ordered the killings, but most Muslim leaders asserted the killings were related to a leadership struggle within the Tabliq group, which follows tenets of Salafist Islam. The trial of 14 suspects for the killing of two of the clerics, and the attempted killing of four other clerics, resumed on October 17 and was ongoing at year's end.

On June 18, media reported Uganda Christian University, a school that has Anglican and non-Anglican students, banned all non-Anglican forms of worship on its campus, stating it had to protect its Anglican values from external influence. A coalition of students from other universities petitioned the speaker of parliament to overturn the ban but received no response by year's end.

Muslim staff at Lubiri Secondary School, a secular public high school in Kampala, reported the institution's Christian head teacher discriminated against Muslim students and staff by prohibiting female students from wearing the hijab and recommending the transfer of Muslim teachers away from the school to other public schools.

The Equal Opportunities Commission did not report by year's end whether it had investigated a group of Muslim women's 2015 allegations that private companies denied them employment because they refused to remove their hijabs, which the companies said violated their dress code. According to the Muslim Center for Justice and Law, in 2015 approximately 10 Muslim women said private companies did not hire them because they refused to remove their hijabs, which the companies stated violated their dress codes.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In June and July the Ambassador broadcast Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr messages on radio and television channels to promote religious tolerance and respect for differences. The Ambassador also hosted an iftar attended by academics and religious and community leaders to promote mutual religious understanding and to help strengthen the embassy's relationships with the Muslim community. In July and August the embassy hosted digital video conferences between representatives of U.S. civil society and local Muslim leaders to promote religious tolerance. The embassy promoted the events on the embassy's social media platforms.

In August the embassy sponsored eight individuals on an exchange program to examine the role of faith-based organizations in the United States. The program brought together civil society and religious leaders to learn about the interplay between religion and politics in the United States and to understand better how faith-based organizations and religious leaders work to protect the rights of citizens whose beliefs and lifestyles may be different from their own. The project also explored the connection between religious conviction, charity, and community service.

Zambia

Executive Summary

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation while prohibiting religious discrimination and providing for freedom of conscience, belief, and religion. On October 27, the parliament created a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, whose role beyond directing national prayers had not yet been defined by the end of the year. Religion was a dominant theme in the pre- and post-general election environment. Various religious groups freely and publicly supported political parties of their choice. Some ruling party political leaders, however, labeled opposition party members as "Satanists," in a move critics stated played on long-held social fears of different denominations. On October 18, the country celebrated a second annual National Day for Prayer and Fasting; however, many church leaders did not participate, stating it blurred the line between church and state. During the commemoration, President Edgar Lungu reaffirmed the country as a Christian nation. Some religious groups continued to criticize the government's decision to build a Christian interdenominational church, arguing it inherently discriminated against non-Christian faiths and breached constitutional provisions for church-state separation.

Incidents of mobs attacking and killing individuals suspected of practicing witchcraft remained widespread. Victims were often elderly members of the community. In August police reported two siblings, Lubasi Mukena and Mubukwano Mukena, killed their 81-

year-old father and critically injured their 68-year-old mother with a machete in Limulunga, Western Province, because they suspected their parents were practicing witchcraft. Community members with white hair were reportedly associated with witchcraft and were targets of attacks and death threats. Some non-Christian groups continued to report societal intolerance and said they were often called “Satanists.”

U.S. embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, met with government officials and with religious leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, including enforcement of registration laws, interfaith relations, and the role of religion in the general election.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 15.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to current U.S. government estimates, 95.5 percent of the country is Christian: 75.3 percent identify as Protestant and 20.2 percent as Roman Catholic. Among Protestants, the Anglican Church and evangelical and Pentecostal groups have the largest numbers of adherents. Nearly 2 percent of the population is Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindus, Bahais, Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs. Approximately 1.8 percent of the population adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions and witchcraft, and there are small communities that hold no religious beliefs. Many people combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

Muslim communities are primarily concentrated in Lusaka and in Eastern and Copperbelt Provinces and are often divided along ethnic or national lines. Many are immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired citizenship. A small minority of indigenous persons are also Muslim. According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai of Zambia, the Bahai community consists of approximately 6,000 adherents located primarily in Northwestern and Southern Provinces. There are approximately 10,000 Hindus, mostly of South Asian descent. Jews number approximately 50, mostly in Lusaka and Luwingu Districts.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the country to be a Christian nation, but upholds freedom of conscience, belief, and religion for all persons. It prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the right of individuals to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. It protects the freedom of individuals to change their religion or belief. It states no one shall be compelled to take an oath or perform acts contrary to his or her religious belief. The law prescribes legal recourse against, and penalties of fines and imprisonment for violations of religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the chief registrar of societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs and pay regular statutory fees. To register, a group must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country’s laws, and adhere to laws pertaining to labor and employment practices and criminal conduct. The chief registrar’s office may consult with the police and religious umbrella organizations, called “church mother bodies,” to determine a group’s suitability for registration. Major church mother bodies include the Zambia Episcopal Conference (Catholic churches), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (evangelical Protestant churches), and the Council of Churches in Zambia (traditional Protestant churches). The law allows the minister of home affairs to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure to pay registration fees or a finding by the minister that the group professes purposes or has taken or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of

“peace, welfare, or good order.” Groups may appeal this finding through the courts. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members but traditionally has not pursued such penalties.

The constitution affords religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction to members of their religious communities. The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine; students may request education in their religion and may opt out of religious instruction only if the school is not able to accommodate their request. Religious education after grade nine is optional and is not offered at all schools. The religious curriculum focuses on Christian teachings, but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

On October 27, the parliament approved President Lungu’s proposal to create a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs. While the president stated the ministry’s purpose was to direct and regulate the religious affairs of the country, by the end of the year, it had only focused on rededicating Zambia as a Christian nation and leading Christian prayers for good crop yields and rains.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In an August 11 constitutional referendum, held alongside the country’s general election, voters rejected the proposal to move language deeming the country a Christian nation from the preamble to the bill of rights section of the constitution. Discussion of a second referendum continued, but the content of a new bill of rights remained unclear.

Religion was a dominant theme surrounding the general election on August 11. The ruling Patriotic Front (PF) frequently used Christian imagery and messaging to support President Lungu’s reelection campaign. Government-run and PF-friendly media often propagated deliberately Christian messages saying President Lungu was “sent by God” or “chosen” to lead the nation. PF supporters and media frequently denigrated opposition candidate Hakainde Hichilema, whom PF supporters called a “Satanist.” Critics stated this charge stemmed from his rumored associations with Freemasons, his membership in a Seventh-day Adventist congregation, and his general lack of Christian allusions in prior campaign messages. Observers stated Hichilema significantly increased Christian references in the campaign in response to these accusations.

In October the government named Godfridah Sumaili to head the newly created Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs. The Catholic and Protestant church mother bodies, along with leaders of minority religions, opposed the creation of the ministry, stating citizens were already able to freely practice their faith. As of the end of the year, the government had not shared clear guidelines on the role and operation of the ministry.

On October 18, the country held its second National Day for Prayer and Fasting. Many church leaders did not participate, stating the event blurred the line between church and state. Various religious groups who participated contributed only minimally. During the government-sponsored event, President Lungu reaffirmed the country’s identification as a Christian nation. The president held a prayer day against political violence on June 24, again facing criticism the event was politically motivated, as it occurred during the general election campaign.

Prominent religious groups continued to argue the state should not be involved in building churches, including the proposed Interdenominational House of Prayer, which was incomplete at year’s end. The Council of Churches in Zambia continued to state the government building a Christian church discriminated against Muslims and other non-Christian groups. Several religious leaders outside the council expressed the same sentiment.

Religious groups reported that the government had yet to publish the findings of a 2015 study on allowing broader inclusivity of diverse faiths in the religious education curriculum. Smaller groups were incorporated in the curriculum consultation process but representatives of minority groups said their contributions largely went ignored.

After hearing concerns about community members with white hair being associated with witchcraft, President Lungu in January reaffirmed the need for sensitization and building of family value systems to ensure the aged are not stigmatized and discriminated against. In February a magistrate called for the amendment of the Witchcraft Act to ensure that individuals who attack others on suspicion of witchcraft are prosecuted in court to prevent citizens from taking the law into their own hands.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Suspected practitioners of witchcraft, particularly elderly members of the community, were often subject to attacks and mob violence, according to tribal chiefs and a former police official. In August police reported two siblings, Lubasi Mukena and Mubukwano Mukena, killed their 81-year-old father and critically injured their 68-year-old mother with a machete in Limulunga, Western Province. According to police, the children suspected their parents were practicing witchcraft.

Some non-Christian communities continued to report being called “Satanist” for adhering to religious or denominational beliefs considered outside the mainstream. Bahai and Messianic Jewish community leaders in particular continued to express concerns that some churches singled out their practitioners as “Satanists.”

Leaders of ecumenical movements, including the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, continued to hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and advocacy on religious issues, including by promoting the restriction of government involvement in leading worship and religious practice. Women’s groups such as the Zambian Women Interfaith Network brought together Muslim and Christian women and continued to promote mutual understanding and to work toward common goals, including freedom to worship without government interference or interdenominational tension.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with and attended events hosted by government officials to discuss topics related to religious freedom, such as enforcement of registration laws, government-run religious observance, broadcast guidelines, interfaith relations, and the use of religion to denigrate political opponents during the general election campaign.

The embassy also met with leaders from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, and other religious groups to discuss interfaith relations, discrimination, government regulations, education requirements, religious broadcast, and religious tolerance. In July the Ambassador hosted an iftar, which was well attended by local Muslim leaders and welcomed among the Muslim community as an opportunity to discuss community development initiatives and how Muslim communities interacted with the country’s Christian majority.

Zimbabwe

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one’s religion, in public or in private and alone or with others. Religious and civil society groups reported the

government continued to target public events and prayer rallies and monitored or harassed church congregations and religiously affiliated NGOs perceived to be critical of the government. A pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church was released on charges of criminal nuisance after demonstrating outside the ruling party annual conference in late 2015. He was arrested again in November for wearing the national flag without seeking permission from Zimbabwean authorities. His trial remained ongoing at year's end. Religious leaders criticized the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for instituting a national pledge in schools without proper consultations.

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed other Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education, as well as encouraging child marriage with girls as young as 14. In October several religious and civil society groups organized and hosted the Second Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Harare which focused on the importance of dialogue in fostering inclusivity and diversity for religious groups.

The U.S. embassy engaged government officials, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 14.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010-2011 nationwide Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted by the government statistic agency, 84.5 percent of the population is Christian, 13 percent reports no religious affiliation, 2 percent adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs, and less than 1 percent is Muslim. According to the DHS, of the total population, 33.5 percent is Apostolic, 18 percent Pentecostal, 15.5 percent other Protestant, 9 percent Roman Catholic, and 8 percent other Christian.

While there are no reliable statistics regarding the percentage of the Christian population that is syncretic, many Christians sometimes also associate themselves with traditional practices, and religious leaders reported a continued increase in syncretism.

The Muslim population is concentrated in rural areas and in some high-density suburbs, with smaller numbers living in suburban neighborhoods. There are also small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious belief and provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, in public or in private and alone or with others. It recognizes the right of prisoners to communicate with and receive visits by their chosen religious counselor. It stipulates these rights may be limited by a law in a state of emergency or by a law taking into account, among other things, the interests of defense; public safety, order, morality, or health; regional or town planning; or the general public interest. Any such law must not impose greater restrictions on these rights than is necessary to achieve the purpose of the law. However, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts freedom of assembly, expression, and association.

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups as well as schools and medical facilities run by

religious groups may receive tax-exempt status. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), which generally grants these requests. To obtain tax-exempt status, a group is required to bring a letter of approval from a church umbrella organization confirming the group's status as a religious group. Examples of approval letter-granting organizations include the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe. ZIMRA will generally grant a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days.

The Ministry of Education sets curricula for public primary and secondary schools. Many public primary schools require a religious education course focusing on Christianity but covering other religious groups, emphasizing religious tolerance. There is no provision for opting out of the religious instruction courses at the primary level. Students are able to opt out at the secondary level beginning at age 14, when they begin to choose their courses. The government does not regulate religious education in private schools, but approves employment of headmasters and teachers at those schools.

The law requires all international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religiously affiliated NGOs, to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government defining the NGO's activities and zones of geographic activity. The law stipulates international NGOs "shall not digress into programs that are not specified in the MOU as agreed upon by line ministries and registered by the Registrar." Local NGOs, including religious NGOs, are not required to sign an MOU with the government but "shall, prior to their registration, notify the local authorities of their intended operations." The law gives the government the right to "deregister any PVO [private voluntary organization] that fails to comply with its conditions of registration."

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to human rights groups and media reports, Patrick Mugadza, pastor of the Remnant Pentecostal Church, was released from prison in January after being detained on charges of criminal nuisance. In December 2015, Mugadza was arrested for demonstrating outside the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front annual conference. He carried a sign with the message "Mr. President the people are suffering, Proverbs 21:13". On November 18, Mugadza was arrested again and charged for unlawfully and intentionally wearing or displaying the national flag over his shoulders without seeking permission from Zimbabwean authorities. Mugadza faces a 200 Zimbabwean dollar fine (\$200) or six months imprisonment if found guilty. His trial was ongoing at year's end.

There were reports the government used security laws to target public events and prayer rallies of religious groups. In December NGO Ibheshu LikaZulu attempted to hold a planned memorial and prayer service for an estimated 20,000 victims of the 1980s Gukurahundi mass killings by government forces. Police blocked the gathering by cordoning off the meeting area and positioning water cannons near the venue. Ibheshu LikaZulu filed an application at the High Court, requesting a cease order on further interference by the police. After the High Court ruled in the NGO's favor, approximately 200 human rights defenders, political leaders, and members of the public attended the event on December 22.

There were reports from religious and civil society groups of government monitoring or harassment of church congregations and religiously affiliated NGOs and their members perceived to be critical of the government. Instances included surveillance by security officials, denial of police permission to hold public events, and investigations into whether organizations were compliant with complex registration requirements. Ibheshu LikaZulu stated its activities were monitored with increased frequency as the January Gukurahundi memorial dates approached. A Christian aid organization said its activities were also monitored with increased frequency, particularly in areas considered strongholds of the political opposition. The organization stated district

officials sometimes required a renegotiated memorandum of understanding if district officials sought more information on a particular organization's activities.

While religious activities and events continued to be exempt from POSA regulations, the government continued to categorize as political any public gathering, including religious gatherings, critical of the ruling party. In July church leaders from nine denominations and organizations released a statement condemning what they stated was the government's disregard of the constitution, selective application of the law, and failure to deal with corruption. The government reportedly became increasingly distrustful of all gatherings and activities by individuals or groups perceived as opponents of the government.

Most official state and school gatherings and functions included nondenominational Christian prayers. In courts and for government officials entering office, individuals often swore on the Bible.

In May the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MPSE) introduced a national pledge to be recited daily by students. Media sources reported many citizens stated the pledge was unconstitutional because it resembles a prayer and pledges allegiance to "Almighty God." Prior to the national pledge, many public schools recited the Lord's Prayer. They also complained the MPSE did not properly consult with religious communities. In June several church leaders led a protest march in Harare, demanding the government revoke the national pledge.

In April public concerns arose over fears that the MPSE intended to halt activities by the interdenominational Christian movement Scripture Union in public schools across the country. To resolve the issue, the MPSE met with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations, a Christian umbrella organization. All parties agreed that Scripture Union activities, which includes facilitating voluntary student groups that read and study the Bible in schools, could continue once the Scripture Union submitted an MOU through the MPSE.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, some Christian groups blamed other Christian groups with indigenous beliefs, particularly the Apostolic community, for increasing HIV/AIDS rates by discouraging condom use and preventing HIV/AIDS education; encouraging child marriage with girls as young as 14; and prohibiting children from receiving immunizations.

In October several religious and civil society groups organized and hosted the Second Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Harare. Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Lazarus Dokora opened the conference with a statement that underscored the importance of dialogue in fostering inclusivity and diversity. Local religious leaders from Christian and Muslims groups participated, as well as representatives from Southern Africa and Iran.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials and with Catholic, evangelical, Protestant Apostolic, and Muslim religious leaders and faith-based NGOs to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.