

BURUNDI

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 law covering nonprofit organizations is the basis for recognition and registration of religious groups, which 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 grant tax exemptions or other benefits to religious groups in general. Some religious and nonreligious schools have signed agreements with the government whereby they are entitled 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 religious and moral 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 morals classes instead.

Government Practices

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In the spring police raided the Bujumbura hiding spot of Eusebie Ngendakumana, accused of leading an unrecognized cult that formed after she reported seeing visions of the Virgin Mary. According to her lawyer, Eusebie was never formally charged with a crime. Eusebie escaped capture and was believed to be in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but several of her followers were detained for worshiping in a banned location and then released. Eusebie's followers detained in previous altercations with the police remained in jail. There were no reports of Eusebie's followers receiving worse treatment than other prisoners.

The Catholic Church stated that three Rwandan priests, including a priest working at the Bujumbura cathedral and two from the Dominican orders, were detained in Bujumbura by the National Intelligence Service (SNR) for short periods in late summer because they were Rwandan and may have provided basic support to local individuals protesting the president's decision to run for a third term. Vatican officials stated the detainees were released when the officials entered into dialogue with SNR agents, and none of the priests were formally charged after their interrogation. The Vatican reported none were physically mistreated, but all were badly shaken by their experiences. They left the country after being released.

The chaplain of the University of Burundi fled the country after receiving threats to his life for supporting an insurgency. He provided moral and religious support to, and helped identify temporary shelter for, approximately 600 university students who sought refuge outside the U.S. embassy in late April after authorities closed the university (including their housing) amid protests of the president's decision to seek re-election. The chaplain accompanied the students during part of their ordeal, eventually negotiating with a Bujumbura parish to open private homes to shelter the students. When the government identified the students as insurgents, the chaplain was forced to flee the country. Several other priests reported similar threats and left the country for a time. At the end of the year, the chaplain still remained abroad although some of the priests returned.

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 land or tax waivers – were granted to religious groups for land or materials to manage development and income-generating projects. Observers said, however, the criteria to receive such benefits were non-transparent and politicized.

BURUNDI 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

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. In March police identified the Bujumbura hiding place of a woman who reported experiencing visitations from the Virgin Mary; they briefly detained several of her followers on charges of worshiping in a banned location, but the woman fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo. During the political, economic, security, and humanitarian crisis related to the country's electoral cycle, the Catholic Church reported several Catholic priests received death threats or were detained for their work supporting people perceived as opposed to the government and for the Church's vocal opposition to the incumbent president's decision to run for a third term.

In June the Catholic Archbishop of Bujumbura, Evariste Ngoyagoye, escaped an apparent assassination attempt during a celebration in which he was expected to speak out against the president running for a third term. Religious groups reported peaceful co-existence with each other, and most Burundians reportedly respected their neighbors' rights to freedom of conscience.

The U.S. embassy continued to encourage the government to support broad-based religious tolerance. Embassy efforts on religious freedom with societal leaders included hosting an iftar and encouraging interfaith discussion of the collaborative role religious groups could play in disseminating a message of peace and tolerance to the population.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.7 million (July 2015 estimate). Although reliable statistics are not available, religious leaders estimate approximately 60 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 20 percent belongs to indigenous religious groups, and 15 percent to Protestant groups. Muslims constitute 2 to 5 percent of the population and live mainly in urban areas. Most Muslims are Sunni, although some are Shia, and there is also a small Ismaili community. There are approximately 500 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are approximately 100 Jains, and the Orthodox Christian community is very small.

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Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In June the Catholic Archbishop of Bujumbura, Evariste Ngoyagoye, escaped an apparent assassination attempt when his congregation noticed young men unfamiliar to them behaving strangely. According to a witness, the crowd celebrating the Mass was infiltrated by approximately 40 youths who planned to disrupt the archbishop's speech if he spoke out to oppose the president's bid for a third term or disagreed with the governing party. Two of the youths carried poorly concealed weapons, including grenades, and other participants dissuaded them from attacking. While no attack occurred, the Catholic hierarchy expressed concern, and Archbishop Ngoyagoye divided his time between the country and other places. The Catholic archbishops of Gitega and Ngozi both left the country for a time after drawing government criticism for their public stance on the elections.

Leaders of major religious groups stated these groups had amicable relations with one another and were able to peacefully resolve minor issues that arose.

The Muslim community was reportedly divided between those who support the president's bid for a third term and those who do not. Community representatives stated that political differences did not affect the community's cohesiveness.

The Mormon community stated its missionaries were recalled in May due to political insecurity.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy continued to encourage the government to support broad-based religious tolerance. The embassy also encouraged the government to welcome the participation of all religious groups to promote a message of harmony and mutual tolerance.

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

The Ambassador hosted an iftar for approximately 30 leaders in the Muslim community and encouraged them to engage in discussions with leaders of other

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religious groups to deliver a joint message of peace to the population, particularly during the electoral period.