

# **SOUTH SUDAN 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The transitional constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom through discussions and outreach with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society organizations.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

According to the 2008 census, the population is approximately 8 million. The majority is Christian. There are no reliable statistics on the Muslim or animist minorities. Studies from the 1980s and the early 2000s estimated that Muslims constituted between 18 and 35 percent of the population, but the number of Muslims has probably declined through migration to Sudan after South Sudanese independence in 2011. The acting general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, which continues to include churches in both Sudan and South Sudan, notes that the seven principal Christian groups are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Sudan Pentecostal, Sudan Interior, Presbyterian Evangelical, and the Inland African Church. A substantial part of the population in isolated parts of the country probably adheres to indigenous religious beliefs or combines Christian and indigenous practices.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The transitional constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The transitional constitution states, "All religions shall be treated equally, and religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes." This document serves as the country's legal framework until the adoption of a permanent constitution.

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The transitional constitution provides the right to freedom of worship; the right to solicit and receive voluntary financial contributions; the right to own property for religious purposes; the right to write, issue, and disseminate religious publications; the right to communicate with individuals and communities in matters of religion and beliefs at national and international levels; the right to teach religion or beliefs in places suitable for these purposes; the right to train, appoint, and designate by succession one's own clergy; and the right to observe religious holidays.

The transitional constitution specifies the regulation of religious matters within each state as the executive and legislative responsibility of the state government.

The transitional constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain appropriate faith-based, charitable, or humanitarian institutions. The government does not require religious groups to register.

The law prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion against public servants, officials, and employees with respect to remuneration, terms, conditions, benefits, and privileges of services.

Offices and businesses follow a Monday through Friday workweek, with Sunday as a day for religious observance. Schools are in session on Friday and do not excuse Muslim students from class.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Moulid, Easter, and Christmas.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom; however, the government imposed restrictions that affected members of minority religious groups.

Muslims reportedly regularly faced subtle discrimination, particularly in applications for citizenship or documentation. Officials sometimes refused passports or other documents for applicants of Arab descent or Muslim faith, often with no explanation.

The presidential advisor on religious affairs released several press statements calling for "peace and unity" among religious groups and spoke at conferences dedicated to building interfaith relations.

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Civil society leaders reported that state governments occasionally expropriated Muslim-owned lands, many of which the pre-independence Sudanese government granted to Muslims during “Islamization” campaigns beginning in the 1980s. Islamic religious groups appealed to national authorities for relief and generally characterized their battles with state governments as “resource driven,” rather than reflective of anti-Muslim prejudice. At year’s end, national authorities had not acted on most of these appeals, which were complicated by the absence of laws governing land rights.

Muslims were well represented in government and held several prominent positions, including the mayoralty of Juba and at least one governorship.

The government did not restrict the presence of foreign missionaries and did not require them to register.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Religious leaders engaged in an active dialogue that underscored the country’s robust level of religious tolerance. Christian and Muslim leaders regularly called upon one another for discussions touching on matters such as appropriate, fair representation of religious faiths in the government. In July prominent Christian and Muslim clerics from across the country attended a one-day workshop on improving interfaith relations hosted by the Sudan Council of Churches. The president and his adviser for religious affairs also attended. In April the Muslim and Christian communities of Torit, located in Eastern Equatoria state, began a joint effort to rebuild a local cathedral.

Members of the press and civil society engaged in heated religious rhetoric when tensions with Sudan were particularly acute, but the longstanding political animosity between Sudan and South Sudan made it difficult to categorize these incidents specifically as religious intolerance. In October a civil society group protested a government proposal to ease travel restrictions between Sudan and South Sudan, arguing that an influx of Muslims from Sudan would “Islamize” society.

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Leaders from all major religious groups attended most ceremonial public events, including the opening of the national assembly and Independence Day ceremonies. Both a Christian representative and a Muslim representative read prayers at these events, with translation from English to Arabic often provided. Such dual readings were common at public events, even smaller and more localized ones.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious freedom through discussions with government officials, religious leaders, and civil society. The ambassador met regularly with key religious leaders, such as the acting secretary general of the Sudan Council of Churches and the leader of the South Sudan Islamic Council.