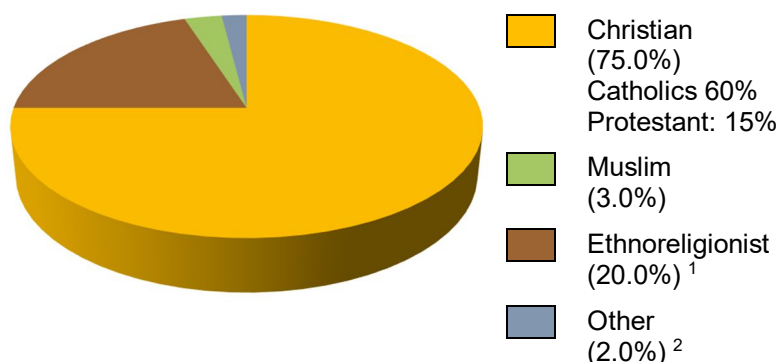


BURUNDI



Area: 27,834 km ²	Population: 8,865,300	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): French, Kirundi
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Legal framework of freedom of religion and actual application

Articles 31 and 32 of the 2005 constitution³ guarantee the right to “freedom of expression, of religion, of thought, of conscience and of opinion”, as well as the right to “freedom of assembly and of association” and “the right to found associations or organizations in accordance with the law”.

The juridical framework concerning matters of religious freedom is ruled by the same legislation of the country that establishes the necessary requirements for the registration and functioning of non-profit associations. This specifies that all religious groups must register at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, presenting their statutes and a list with the names and CVs of the members from their board of governors. Once they receive approval from the Ministry, they are free to carry out their activities.

Burundi adheres to the principle of the secular character of the state, thus respecting all religious denominations and treating them equally, avoiding any discrimination. Its citizens have a right to convert to the religion of their choice without any restrictions. All religious groups have a right to engage in evangelization, catechesis, teaching in schools and hospitals and in the different media (radio, TV and press). The state also guarantees the freedom to build places of worship and to raise funds, inside and outside the country, without any interference from the state.

Incidents

Burundi went through a deadly war, fueled by ethnic tensions, from 1993 to 2005. It killed an estimated 300,000 and sent into exile more than one million people.⁴ During the conflict, several religious (monks, nuns and others) were attacked and lost their lives. Once the peace accord was signed, there were no reports of incidents against religious freedom or of aggression against religious personnel. But on 7th September 2014 the country was shocked to learn of the brutal murder of three elderly Xaverian Missionary Italian sisters: Lucia Pulici, 75, Olga Raschiatti, 82, and Bernadetta Boggian, 79. In two separate attacks, the nuns were reportedly raped, beaten and stabbed to death in the Kamenge neighbourhood of the capital, Bujumbura.⁵ On the same day police said 33-year-old Christian Butoyi Claude, a suspect in their custody, confessed to the killings, saying the convent was built on his family’s land. But the authorities of his religious order questioned the Police version of events. On 19th January 2015, a popular radio presenter, Bob

Rugurika (Radio Publique Africaine), was arrested after prosecutors accused him of concealing the identity of a guest. During an interview in early January, the guest said he was involved in killing the three nuns. The guest also identified some others allegedly suspected of involvement in the killings, including former and serving intelligence and police officers, although without providing any evidence. Mr. Butoyi was released on bail one month later.

In 2015 Burundi was plunged into its worst crisis since the end of the civil war in 2005, when President Pierre Nkurunziza's stood for re-election, seeking a third term at the end of June. Opposition supporters said the move was unconstitutional. Following a coup attempt in mid-May 2015, the government blocked social networks and all the main private radios were not authorized to broadcast, including Radio Maria, owned by the Catholic Church. The government accused the radio stations of having encouraged insurrection. By mid-June, the authorities said that the radio stations were free to operate, although in practice the police prevented media professionals from accessing the premises of their radio stations.

From the beginning of this latest crisis, as early as March 2015, the Catholic Church did not support President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term, estimating that he had violated the constitution. The Church called for an inclusive political dialogue, saying that "no God-loving leader could be against it", in a likely allusion to President Nkurunziza, who is a pastor of a born-again church. The Archbishop of Gitega, Simon Ntamwana, advised against the President's bid for a new term in a homily given on 29th March 2015 in Kiryama's parish church.⁶ At the same time, the Burundian Catholic Episcopal Conference appealed to all political leaders to "ask themselves where they were driving the nation, since the country was at a crossroads". In response to this statements, the president of the ruling party CNDD-FDD (Congres National pour la Defence de la Democratie-Forces pour la Defence de la Democratie), said in his Facebook page that the behaviour of the Catholic Church was "disappointing the Burundian people" and that the bishops were playing a "purely political role, and no longer a spiritual one". In a related event, in mid-March, the country's Minister of Internal Affairs, Pascal Barandagiye, accused "the leaders of certain churches" of uttering "appalling statements that brought divisions among the population and supported trouble-makers and terrorists".⁷

On 27th May 2015, one week before the legislative elections, the Episcopal Conference announced that the Catholic Church was withdrawing its entire clergy working with the country's electoral commission. Mgr Gervais Banshimiyubusa, president of the Episcopal Conference, justified this decision by saying that "Since the Church has a mission of reconciliation, we cannot take part in a process where there is an absence of consensus". Soon after, the Catholic Parish of Muramba, in the province of Muyinga, was forced to close its doors after several militants of the CNDD-FDD ruling party harassed the priests, calling them "dogs".⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Since the beginning of the latest political crisis in Burundi, the country has progressively moved towards civil unrest and political violence. The Catholic Church's opposition to President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term and its support for political dialogue has met with hostility from the ruling party and government officials. In this context, during the reporting period, freedom of religion has deteriorated and this trend is likely to continue in the near future.

¹ Indigenous Religious Groups.

² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

³ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burundi_2005.pdf

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13085064>

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/13/italian-nuns-murdered-in-burundi-funeral_n_5813844.html

⁶ <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/227967/politique/burundi-l-glise-catholique-s-oppose-la-candidature-de-pierre-nkurunziza-la-pr-sidentielle/>

⁷ <http://www.afriqueactualite.com/politique/afrique/5089-l-eglise-catholique-burundaise-interpelle-bujumbura#.Vwly95yW74A>

⁸ <http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/Afrique/Au-Burundi-l-Eglise-catholique-desavoue-le-processus-electoral-2015-05-28-1317176>