

ETHIOPIA

OTHER COUNTRIES AND REGIONS MONITORED

KEY FINDINGS

Religious freedom violations are prevalent in a number of countries in the Horn of Africa region. The Ethiopian government engages in serious religious freedom violations in response to concerns about terrorism and religious extremism.

BACKGROUND

Ethiopia is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. The 2007 census estimates 44 percent of the country's population is Ethiopian Orthodox, 35 percent is Sunni Muslim, and 19 percent is Evangelical and Protestant. Small numbers of Eastern Rite, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and followers of indigenous religions also are present. Religious and ethnic identities often overlap.

Ethiopia has a long history of religious tolerance and interreligious cooperation. The Ethiopian constitution protects freedom of religion or belief and provides for separation of religion and state.

Interference in the Muslim Community and Convictions for Peaceful Protests

In response to concerns about rising extremism, in 2011–2012 the Ethiopian government imposed the al-Ahbash interpretation of Islam on the country's Muslim community; interfered in the independence of the community's representative body, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council; and then arrested and prosecuted Muslims who opposed these actions through peaceful protests.

[A]t least 50 additional peaceful protestors reportedly remain detained and are being prosecuted for demonstrating against the continued imprisonment of Muslim leaders.

In 2015, 18 leaders of the 2012 Muslim protest movement were convicted of plotting to institute an Islamic

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

USCIRF recommends that in its policies toward Ethiopia, the U.S. government should (1) call for the release of religious prisoners of conscience; and (2) include religious freedom promotion in countering violent extremism programs

government and sentenced to seven to 22 years in prison under Ethiopia's controversial Anti-Terror Proclamation (ATP). U.S. government officials and human rights organizations have criticized the Ethiopian government's use of the ATP to silence critics. Since those convictions, the Ethiopian government has pardoned 13 of the leaders, including eight in September 2016. Some of those freed told USCIRF staff during a trip to Addis Ababa in December that government officials have not harassed or prevented them from engaging in religious activities since their release, but that authorities did warn them not to renew protests. Nevertheless, at least 50 additional peaceful protestors reportedly remain detained and are being prosecuted for demonstrating against the continued imprisonment of Muslim leaders. On December 21, 2016, an Ethiopian court convicted 20 of the remaining detainees under the ATP. On January 3, 2017, they were each sentenced to five and a half years' imprisonment.