

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

6 July 2012

TGO104139.FE

Togo: The practice of voodoo in Togo, particularly in the Vo Asso tribe; rituals to become a voodoo priest and traditions

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Limited information on the practice of voodoo in Togo could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. Information on the practice of voodoo in the Vo Asso tribe or on the rituals for becoming a voodoo priest could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following information may be of some interest.

According to an article published in 2008 by Agence France-Presse (AFP), 60 percent of the Togolese population practises voodoo (23 July 2008). An article from a private news agency in Togo, *Savoir News*, published in April 2012, indicates that 52 percent of the Togolese population practises voodoo (*Savoir News* 9 Apr. 2012). In an interview with *Savoir News* in December 2011, the national president of voodoo priests in Togo told the journalist questioning him about the practice of voodoo that it would be [translation] "very difficult to tell him certain things" because the journalist was an outsider (ibid. 26 Dec. 2011).

A report from the government of Togo submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2009 in relation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights indicated that

[UN English version]

[i]n order to enable children to receive education and to follow voodoo initiation rites in accordance with tradition, the Ministry of Social Action, Advancement of Women and Protection of Children and the Elderly in 2007 included heads of convents in discussions about the excessively long duration of these initiation ceremonies for children (three years). Through the action of local child protection committees, together with the open-minded attitude of heads of convents, initiation of children takes place during the school holidays over a period of 2-4 weeks, thereby enabling children to take part in voodoo initiation rites. (Togo 17 Oct. 2009, para. 105)

Also, the national president of voodoo priests stated that children enter the convent during the vacation period for one or two months (*Savoir News* 9 Apr. 2012).

In a report on Togo published in July 2011 by the United Nations Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review, the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) indicated that, in Togo, the traditional practice of placing children in voodoo convents is [UN English version] "harmful" (United Nations 22 July 2011, para. 30). The BICE is [BICE English version] "an international catholic network of organisations engaged in the promotion and protection of the children's rights and of their dignity" (BICE n.d.). Moreover, in its report submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the government of Togo stated that [UN English version] "[i]n the Maritime and des Plateaux regions ... there are practices in convents whereby children in particular undergo rites of initiation that are prejudicial to their development and physical

integrity" (Togo 17 Oct. 2009, para. 104). In March 2012, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that the [UN English version] "harmful" practice of rites regarding the training of girls in the voodoo priesthood persists (UN 8 Mar. 2012, para. 57).

AFP reported in 2008 that there were [translation] "rumours" of young girls being raped in the voodoo convents (23 July 2008). In the interview with the national president of voodoo priests in Togo in April 2012, Savoir News stated that there was [translation] "a controversy surrounding the situation of girls in the convents. They are seduced and even raped in the convents during rituals performed by voodoo priests" (Savoir News 9 Apr. 2012). The president replied that

[translation]

sexual relations are not permitted for eight days prior to entering the convent. At the convent, men are not allowed to go near the girls.

A "voodoosi" who agrees to sleep with a voodoo priest in a convent becomes "Allaga."

She does not go insane but she will never be herself again. (*ibid.*)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 23 July 2008. Émile Kouton. "Togo : les fillettes asservies des couvents vaudou retournent à l'école." <<http://www.lapresse.ca/international/200809/08/01-666308-togo-les-fillettes-asservies-des-couvents-vaudou-retournent-a-lecole.php>> [Accessed 5 July 2012]

BICE, International Catholic Child Bureau. N.d. "Découvrir le BICE." <<http://www.BICE.org/fr/bureau-international-catholique-de-l-enfance/presentation-BICE/decouvrir-le-BICE.html>> [Accessed 3 July 2012]

Savoir News. 9 April 2012. Junior Aurel. "Togbui Gnagblondjro III : 'Le Vaudou n'est pas satanique. Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui doivent s'approcher de leurs grands parents et leur demander ce qui les protégeait'." <<http://atoptogo.blogspot.ca/2012/04/togbui-gnagblondjro-iii-vaudou-n-pas.html>> [Accessed 25 June 2012]

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Togo. 17 October 2009. *Examen des rapports présentés par les États parties en vertu de l'article 40 du Pacte. Quatrième rapport périodique des États parties. Togo.* (CCPR/C/TGO/4) <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/AdvanceDocs/CCPR-C-TGO4_fr.doc> [Accessed 29 June 2012]

United Nations. 8 March 2012. Committee on the Rights of the Child. *Examen des rapports soumis par les États parties en application de l'article 44 de la Convention. Observations finales : Togo.* (CRC/C/TGO/CO/3-4) <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/413/01/PDF/G1241301.pdf?OpenElement>> [Accessed 29 June 2012]

_____. 22 July 2011. Human Rights Council. *Résumé établi par le Haut-Commissariat aux droits de l'homme conformément au paragraphe 15 c) de l'annexe à la résolution 5/1 du Conseil des droits de l'homme.* (A/HRC/WG.6/12/TGO/3) <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/151/91/PDF/G1115191.pdf?OpenElement>> [Accessed 29 June 2012]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: A professor of anthropology and an expert in Haitian voodoo were unable to provide information for this Response. Attempts to contact a representative of the Canadian Togolese Community and a professor of social anthropology were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica.com; ecoi.net; Factiva; France24; Geotours; Institut français de recherche en Afrique; Jeune Afrique; Letogolais.com; Mail & Guardian Online; Mo5-togo.com; Le Monde; Persée; Portail Togo tourisme; Radio Gameli; Radio Lomé; Radio France internationale; République togolaise; Togo-Presse; United Nations – Refworld; United States – Department of State; Voyage Vaudou Afrique.

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