

BURKINA FASO 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states the country is a secular state, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. The government subsidized travel costs for Muslim Hajj pilgrims and allocated subsidies to the four main religious communities. In August the High Council of Communication (CSC) summoned and questioned executives from the Al Houda and Femina FM radio stations for content it stated was “undermining the principle of religious tolerance.” The government appointed representatives of the main religious communities to be part of the commission in charge of drafting a new constitution.

On January 15, gunmen armed with heavy weapons attacked a restaurant and two hotels in Ouagadougou, killing 30 and wounding more than 50. A counterattack by Burkinabe and international forces killed three attackers and freed 176 people who had been trapped in one of the hotels. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attacks, which they described in a statement as being targeted against the “enemies of religion.”

In July, in a land-related dispute between the Muslim community and the Siamou ethnic group in Orodara, young people looted and vandalized a Sunni mosque on the disputed land.

Embassy staff regularly discussed incidents affecting religious freedom with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, including the incident in Orodara. The U.S. embassy organized a roundtable on religious freedom in September to promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue. Embassy officers also met with religious leaders to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 19.5 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2006 census, 61 percent of the population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni, 19 percent is Roman Catholic, 4 percent belong to various Protestant groups, and 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs. Less than 1 percent is atheist or belongs to other religious groups. Statistics on religious

affiliation are approximate because Muslims and Christians often adhere simultaneously to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced throughout the country, especially in rural communities. The capital has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. There is no significant correlation between religious affiliation, ethnicity, or political or socio-economic status.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is secular, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. The constitution states freedom of belief is subject to respect for law, public order, good morals, and “the human person.” Political parties based on religion, ethnicity, or regional affiliation are forbidden.

The law allows all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, which is in charge of religious affairs. The ministry, through the Directorate for Customary Affairs and Worship, monitors the implementation of standards for burial, exhumation, and transfer of the remains; helps organize religious pilgrimages; promotes and fosters interreligious dialogue and peace; and develops and implements measures for the erection of places of worship and the registration of religious organizations and religious congregations. The registration process usually takes approximately three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA francs (\$80). Registration confers legal status but no specific obligations or benefits. Religious organizations are not required to register, but when they do so, failure to comply with applicable regulations required by all registered organizations may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$80 to \$240).

Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify they are in accordance with the nature of the religious group as stated in their registration.

Religious teaching is not allowed in public schools. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate private primary and secondary schools and some schools of higher education. By law, schools (religious or otherwise) must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools with the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, but the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The National Observatory of Religious Facts (ONAFAR), an organization created by the government to “monitor regulations on cultural practices” and promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue, continued to monitor religious communities and cultural practices. Along with monitoring, the ONAFAR played a mediator role within the religious community. In August the ONAFAR monitored a dispute among members of the Federation of Burkina Islamic Associations (FAIB), an organization intended to unite Muslim organizations in Burkina Faso, on the renewal of their leadership.

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications, according to religious group leaders.

The government did not fund religious schools or require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. Likewise, the government taxed religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production. The government reviewed the curricula of religious schools to ensure they offered the full standard academic curriculum; however, the majority of Quranic schools were not registered, and thus their curricula were not reviewed.

The government allocated 75 million CFA francs (\$120,000) each to the Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and traditional animistic communities. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, the government could provide an additional subsidy when the religious community or organization pursued a mission of general interest, such as education, health, or vocational training; when the religious community conducted an activity of national interest, such as promoting peace or social stability; or when the success or failure of an activity could have affected a significant part of the population, as in the case of religious pilgrimages. For example, in September the government allocated approximately 1.1 billion CFA francs (\$1.76 million) to subsidize the

cost of the pilgrimage of the 5,500 Muslims going on the Hajj. The government also provided funding to registered Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim (commonly referred to as “Franco-Arabic”) schools through subsidies for teacher salaries, which were typically less than those of public school teachers.

In March the government established a constitutional commission to draft a new constitution. Of the 92 members appointed in June, six were representatives of the main religious communities.

The ethics commission of the High Council of Communication (CSC), the governmental body in charge of regulating media, summoned and questioned officials of the Al Houda and Femina FM radio stations on August 12 for content it stated was “undermining the principle of religious tolerance” and violating the terms of agreements signed between the CSC and media organizations. According to the CSC, Al Houda and Femina FM broadcast “offending” sermons. The government stated the broadcasts in question provided a comparative analysis of Islam and other religions with a “strong tendency to denigrate other religions, including Christianity.” The media executives present at the hearing reportedly indicated to the CSC they had not listened to the sermons in question beforehand and pledged to take steps to prevent such content in the future.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

On January 15, gunmen armed with heavy weapons attacked a restaurant and two hotels in Ouagadougou, killing 30 and wounding more than 50. A counterattack by Burkinabe and international forces killed three attackers and freed 176 people who had been trapped in one of the hotels. AQIM and Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attacks, which they described in a statement as being targeted against the “enemies of religion.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In July in the midst of a years-long dispute and an ongoing legal battle between the Muslim community and members of the Siamou ethnic group about ownership of a plot of land in Orodara, a group of Siamou youths looted and vandalized a Sunni mosque located on the disputed land. According to media reports, a recent addition to the mosque, built on land the Siamou community reportedly considered sacred, triggered the incident. Local and national authorities attempted unsuccessfully to mediate between the two groups. In August the minister of territorial administration, decentralization, and internal security met with

delegations of the FAIB and ONAFAR to discuss the dispute in Orodara and encourage the parties to find a peaceful resolution. Both delegations stated they welcomed the initiative of the minister and said they were committed to bring key actors together to find “consensual and durable solutions.”

Members of the Burkinabe Muslim Community Organization, the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, and the (Protestant) Federation of Evangelical Churches stated religious tolerance was widespread and numerous examples existed of families of mixed faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy staff regularly discussed incidents affecting religious freedom with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security, including the incident in Orodara.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met separately with Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders throughout the country, at the local and national levels, to encourage their efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and advocate for religious tolerance and freedom.

The embassy organized a roundtable on religious freedom on September 15. Guests included two representatives of each of the Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities; the director of religious affairs at the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Internal Security; the president of the ONAFAR; and two journalists. The discussion focused on the participants’ views of the state of religious freedom in the country, ways to promote interfaith dialogue, and how to maintain peaceful coexistence among the various religious communities.