

Religious Freedom in the Republic of Guinea

Executive Summary

(1) In the year 1958, the Republic of Guinea became independent from French rule. The country's constitution, officially instituted on December 23, 1990, allows for religious freedom. Other laws and policies within the country promote the freedom of religious practice. The country has minimal reports of societal abuses or discrimination with the impetus of religious affiliation, practice, or belief. Despite the general religious freedom found in Guinea, at times the government does tend to favor Muslims over other religious groups. Current unrest in the country due to protest against a military coup may lead to societal unrest in the country and effect the overall stability of religious freedom in the Republic of Guinea.

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy

(2) The Institute on Religion and Public Policy is an international, inter-religious non-profit organization that strives to guarantee religious freedom worldwide. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the Institute supports all fundamental rights with an emphasis on religious freedom. The Institute works with many influential individuals such as scholars, business executives, policy makers, religious leaders, and non-governmental organizations in order to encourage the furthering of religious freedom in a cooperative way across the globe.

Legal Status

(3) The constitution of the Republic of Guinea protects the rights of its citizens to select, change, and practice their own religious beliefs. As the current situation stands, the protection of freedom of religion in Guinea has yet to be tested through any legal or judicial process. The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs hopes to further the protection of religious freedom through encouraging better relations between various religions as well as improving the interreligious and interethnic tensions in Guinea. Plans to create positions for a National Director of Christian Affairs and a National Director of Islamic Affairs in order to aid in the goals of improving religious freedom have been proposed by the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. These positions have yet to be established.

(4) The government uses a registration system in order to regulate religions in the Republic of Guinea. All new religious groups are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior and Security. When a religion registers, that denomination receives entitlement to value-added tax exemptions on incoming shipments as well as some energy subsidies. Many unregistered religious groups exist in the country. These unregistered religious organizations do not have the ability to receive the benefits of the registered religions. Furthermore, the unregistered

religions may be expelled from the country. With expulsion, there is little legal opportunity to appeal the decision of the government. Although this expulsion clause exists, no religious groups have been expelled from Guinea to this date. Before registration occurs, the religious organization needs to receive approval from the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs.

(5) The government made the decision to not appoint non-Muslim politicians to important administrative positions in various regions. Non-Muslims were not appointed in these particular regions because of the strong social Islamic dominance that could be found in those areas. Non-Muslims were permitted to be appointed to other positions in the government. Various cabinet, armed forces, and other administrative bureaucracy offices were given to non-Muslim individuals.

(6) In December 2008, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara took control of Guinea through a bloodless coup after the death of the country's president. Camara appointed himself as the president of the National Council for Democracy. The council is intended to be a transitional body that will help the country return to democracy. Furthermore, Camara declared that he would not run the upcoming presidential election. By April 2009, Camara began to say that he might run for election, reneging on his previous promise. In August 2009, Camara set the presidential election date as January 31, 2009. By September 2009, many people begin to be unnerved by Camara's tactics and decisions. Guinea received the threat of sanctions from the African Union if Camara runs in the upcoming presidential election. Also, at the end of September 2009, protests against Camara's rule end in violence as the military kills, wounds, and sexually assaults many of the generally peaceful protestors. The rule of Camara, which is becoming more bizarre and violent over time, may possibly threaten the relatively peaceful societal and governmental status of Guinea, including the generally stable religious freedom in the country.

Societal and Cultural Status

(7) The dominant religion in the Republic of Guinea is Islam. Typically, the Muslims of Guinea are Sunni. The population is comprised of 85% Muslim individuals, 10% Christian followers, and 5% people of indigenous beliefs. Islam has the majority in all four regions of Guinea. Christians can be found mostly in the southern region, eastern forest region, and in large towns. Those who practice indigenous beliefs are typically found in the forest regions.

(8) Within the Muslim and Christian communities, some groups integrate the indigenous beliefs into their religions. The percentage of those who regularly practice their religion is extremely high in Guinea. There is a large participation rate because the traditional cultural rituals are often closely related to religious

practices. Within the immigrant and refugee communities, they typically practice the same religion as the native citizens.

(9) A tradition of Islamic schools exists in Guinea. There are a few madrassahs within the country that are not formally a part of the public school system. These madrassahs do not receive recognition from the government because these schools teach only Arabic and Islam. The Ministry of Education is currently trying to incorporate the madrassahs into the government- financed system. If the madrassahs join this system, these schools will be obligated to offer religious instruction as well as a public school curriculum.

(10) The government has established the Inter-Religious Council. There have been efforts made by the government to invite various religions to this council. Religious groups who participate in this council can participate in civic education efforts.

(11) The ownership of private radio or television by religious groups or political parties has been forbidden by the government of Guinea. Despite this fact, religions and political parties can still legally broadcast on other privately owned or commercial radio. Furthermore, Islam and Christian programs are allowed to use seventy-five minutes per week to broadcast on national television.

Abuse of Religious Liberty

(12) Despite, a generally peaceful past, some issues of infringement of religious freedom have cropped up. One of the major issues stems from the belief of many non-Muslims that the government tends to favor the Muslim population. One example of this appears in the canceling of school on Fridays so Muslims can go to mosque. Unfortunately, the government has declared that school be in session on Sundays which does not allow Christian students to go to church. Another example rests upon the pilgrimage to Mecca that the government facilitated for the Muslims. The government did not provide an equivalent option to the other religious communities.

(13) A strong economic, social, and cultural pressure exists within some areas of the country to not convert from Islam. In one instance, a man converted from Islam to Christianity. After his conversion, it was reported that the community rejected him. Also, his relatives took away his children. Besides a strong pressure to not convert from Islam, there also exists a pressure from the Islamic community to not let other religions publicly practice in the society. Allegedly, the government has supported these pressures at a local level. This support mostly comes from the help of the Ministry for Islamic Affairs within the government. This power is not checked due to the fact that no other ministries for other religions exist in the government.

(14) In a more specific case of religious liberty abuse, a group of Muslims attacked a group of Baptists. This incident, which occurred in October 2006, happened during a Baptists function. The Muslim group proclaimed that their actions were based on the disturbance from the loud music the Baptists were using. The music, according to the Muslims, was inhibiting their ability to pray in a nearby mosque.

(15) There have been no reports in Guinea of religious prisoners or detainees. Furthermore, no reports exist of forced conversions.

United States Government Policy and Efforts

(16) The United States Government has established a dialogue with the Republic on Guinea concerning religious freedom. The decision of the United States to discuss freedom of religion with Guinea supports the policy of the promotion of human rights. Also, a symposium was sponsored by the United States embassy. The symposium, entitled "Women of Action", allowed those who participated to discuss how Islam impacted their freedom. Furthermore, the symposium supported the participants' ability to practice religion, whether it is Islam, Christianity, or another religion, in a way that agreed with their personal conscience.

Conclusion

(17) The Republic of Guinea has a solid foundation for religious freedom throughout the country. Throughout the years, Guinea has not needed to deal with many conflicts pertaining to religious liberty. In order to maintain the situation as well as enhance the freedom of religion, Guinea must make room in the government for other religions besides Islam. Furthermore, politicians should work to establish a more welcoming society to non-Islamic religions as well as converts from the Islamic faith. The coup of December 2008 is becoming a threat to the stability of the state. If the country does not stabilize their government soon, various freedoms, including the freedom of religion, maybe severely compromised within the Republic of Guinea.