



Guinea

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

Relations between the various religions generally are amicable. However, in some areas, strong social pressure discourages non-Muslims from openly practicing their religion, and the Government tends to defer to local Muslim sensibilities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 94,926 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8.4 million. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, approximately 85 percent of the population adheres to Islam, 10 percent follows various Christian faiths, and 5 percent holds traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims in the country generally adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam; there are relatively few adherents of the Shi'a branch, although they are increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and other Christian evangelical churches active in the country and recognized by the Government. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religions among the expatriate community. Few citizens, if any, profess atheism.

Although there are no known organized heterogeneous or syncretistic religious communities, followers of Islam and Christianity incorporated syncretistic tendencies into the practice of both, reflecting the continuing influence and acceptability of traditional indigenous beliefs and rituals.

Demographically, Muslims are a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the southern part of the country, and in the eastern forest region. Christians are also found in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon region in the middle of the country, where the deep cultural entrenchment of Islam in Pular (or Fulani or Peuli) society makes it difficult to establish other religious communities. Traditional indigenous religions are most prevalent in the forest region.

No data is available regarding active participation in formal religious services or rituals; however, the Ministry of the National Islamic League, formerly the National Islamic League (NIL), estimates that 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

The country's large immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same faiths as

citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of traditional indigenous religions.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country and include Roman Catholic, Philafricaine, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many American missionary societies.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion; however, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that the Government required government ministers to take an oath on either the Koran or the Bible.

Both Muslim and Christian holidays are recognized by the Government and celebrated by the population. Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Easter, Assumption Day, Christmas, Tabaski, Maouloud, and Ramadan.

The government-controlled official press, which includes the daily "Horoya" and the Guinean Radio and TV network, reports on religious events involving both Islamic and Christian groups.

All religious groups newly operating in the country are required to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration with the Government entitles religious organizations to VAT exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate in the country; however, without official recognition, they were not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to Government expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal.

The small Baha'i community practices its faith openly and freely though it is not officially recognized; it is unknown whether the community has asked for official recognition.

Like other religious groups seeking government recognition, missionary groups are required to apply and declare their aims and activities to the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Most new missionary groups join the Association of Churches and Missions in Guinea (AEMEG) and receive assistance in fulfilling the administrative requirements of the recognition process.

With rare exceptions, foreign missionary groups and church-affiliated relief agencies operate freely in the country.

There were reports during the year that the Government, under a previously unused law, began requiring foreign members of missionary and church groups to pay a visa fee. In previous years, visas were free for members of church groups.

All private schools are required to register with the Government's Ministry of Pre-University and Civic Education. The Government's Service for Statistics and Planning, which is part of the Ministry of Pre-University and Civic Education, officially monitors all secular and religious private schools to ensure they follow the standard national curriculum. Due to the high demand for education and the inadequate supply of teachers and schools in urban areas, the number of unregistered private schools grew. Because of limited government resources, unregistered schools were not closed, but rather were ignored by government authorities. However, students at unregistered schools graduated without any recognized credentials or certificates. While there were some government-financed "Franco-Arab" schools, which included religious instruction in their curriculum, the vast

majority of students attend secular public schools.

There is a general tradition of Koranic schools throughout the country. Koranic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region, which was ruled as an Islamic theocracy during the 18th century.

There are a few scattered madrassas, schools usually associated with a mosque, in the northern part of the country and in the Forest Region. Private radical Islamic groups sponsored such schools with foreign funds. The madrassas were not linked with the public school system and were not recognized by the Government. As with other private schools, madrassas may be closed arbitrarily since they do not have the Government's official recognition.

Missionaries also operate their own schools with no interference from the Government. Catholic and Protestant schools are primarily in Conakry but there are some throughout the country as well. Christian missionary schools teach the national curriculum (which is not influenced by religion), and include a special education component for Christians.

The Government did not have a specific program to promote interfaith understanding; however, the Government met with the Inter-Religious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic and Protestant churches, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The Government included the Inter-Religious Council in dialogue efforts with opposition parties on electoral and governmental reform during the period covered by this report. The Government also invited all religious groups to participate in its civic education efforts and included different religious groups in its national prayers for peace.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of the National Islamic League represents the country's Sunni Muslim majority. The Ministry's stated policy is to promote better relations with other religious denominations and dialogue aimed at ameliorating interethnic and interreligious tensions. The Government has spoken out against the proliferation of Shi'a fundamentalist groups on the grounds that they "generate confusion and deviation" within the country's Islamic family. On at least one occasion, the Government refused to allow the opening of a foreign-funded Shi'a Islamic school; otherwise, the religious activities of these groups were not restricted.

Government support of Islam through the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has led some non-Muslims to claim the Government uses its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. Conversions of senior officials to Islam, such as the former Defense Minister, are ascribed to the Ministry's efforts to influence the religious beliefs of senior government leaders. Nevertheless, non-Muslims are represented in the Cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and the armed forces. However, the Government refrains from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the particularly strong social dominance of Islam in these regions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the various religions generally are amicable; however, in some parts of the country, Islam's dominance was such that there was strong social pressure that discouraged non-Muslims from openly practicing their religion.

In June, a violent clash between Muslim Malinke and Christian Guerze ethnic groups left two dead in Nzerekore. The incident was prompted more by ethnic rather than religious tensions. It represents a continuation of the long-simmering ethnic tensions that resulted in similarly violent clashes in 1992 and 2000.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities and monitors developments affecting religious freedom.

The Embassy sponsors lectures and seminars that provide information on the religious diversity found in American society. The Embassy's American Center sponsored an exhibit on "Muslim Life in America" that included reading material, a documentary, and a poster show. The Embassy also distributed copies of the U.S. Government-sponsored Arabic language magazine, "Hi", to imams and mosques in Conakry. The Embassy sponsored a tour of Conakry's Grand Mosque for members of the expatriate American community. Similarly, the Ambassador and an Embassy delegation visited a historic mosque in Dinguiraye, in northern Guinea, and held a discussion with Muslim clerics there. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials also met with the leaders of the Ministry of the National Islamic League.

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