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Burkina Faso

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. At times however, community members accused widowed and childless elderly women, primarily living in rural areas, of witchcraft and banished them from their villages.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 106,000 square miles and a population of 15.7 million (2010 estimate). The 2006 census stated that 61 percent of the population practices Islam, with the majority being Sunni. The government also estimated that 19 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs, and 4 percent are members of various Protestant denominations. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Islam and Christianity are consistently practiced in tandem with indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians live in the center of the country. Persons practice indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city, is mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities reside in these two cities and are more than 90 percent Christian.

There are approximately 63 different ethnic groups. Most are religiously heterogeneous, but the Fulani and Dioula communities are majority Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government enforces these protections.

The constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provided the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The government observed and enforced these provisions. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religious beliefs were practiced freely without government interference.

The government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications. Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. According to the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 cfa francs(\$108 to \$325).

Religious organizations operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. The Ministry of Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation.

The government taxes religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production. Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures, such as zoning regulations, in pursuit of particular activities; however, they did not experience bureaucratic procedures that were more onerous than those experienced by nonreligious groups.

Public schools did not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operated primary and secondary schools. Some tertiary institutions were also operated by Muslim and Christian organizations. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the government did not appoint or approve these officials.

The government did not fund religious schools, nor did it require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. The government reviewed the curricula of religious schools to ensure that they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, it did not seek to influence religious curricula.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced elderly women accused of being witches to flee their villages. Over the last few years, the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity has recorded a total of 718 women who had been accused of witchcraft and chased from their villages. During the reporting period, 18 women fled their villages and were rescued by nongovernmental organizations. The Delwende Catholic Center provided refuge to 350 people (including six men) during the year, including the 18 women accused of witchcraft.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

In line with its outreach events to discuss religious pluralism and freedom in the United States, the embassy hosted a multifaith iftar (evening meal during Ramadan). The embassy also selected a Catholic leader to participate in the International Visitor Program that specifically focused on religious freedom and interfaith dialogue. Finally, the embassy met with senior mosque and Muslim community leaders and organized a clothing donation ceremony at the Ouagadougou Grand Mosque.

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