



Burkina Faso

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom 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; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee 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 14.8 million. The 2006 census stated that 61 percent of the population practices Islam and that the majority of this group is 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 the majority of citizens practice indigenous religious beliefs to varying degrees and adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs is often nominal.

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 the two largest 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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provide the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The Government observes and enforces these provisions. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religious beliefs are practiced freely without government interference.

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.

The Government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. According to Article 45 of the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of \$108 to \$325 (50,000 Communauté Financière Africaine francs to 150,000 CFA francs). The Government gives all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approves their applications. The Government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

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 accord with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation.

Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures, such as zoning regulations, in pursuit of particular activities.

Public schools do not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. Although school officials have to submit the names of their directors to the Government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the Government does not appoint or approve these officials.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom 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 religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee their villages. The Catholic Church-funded Delwende Center, which houses and feeds women accused of witchcraft, reported several cases. The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, along with religious and other nongovernmental organizations,

maintained similar shelters in Ouagadougou.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

The Embassy and some Muslim organizations cosponsored workshops and public events to discuss religious pluralism in the United States and promote its continued practice locally. The Embassy also sent one Muslim and one Protestant leader to the United States on an International Visitor Program focusing on religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.