



Chad

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government bans certain Muslim groups.

The Government continued to restrict some religious organizations and practices. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between fundamentalist and moderate Muslims. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 495,755 square miles and a population of 10 million. More than half of the population is Muslim, approximately one-third is Christian, and the remainder follows indigenous religious beliefs or has no religion. Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or indigenous religions. However, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas.

The majority of Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A minority of Muslims (5 to 10 percent) hold more fundamentalist beliefs, which in some cases are associated with Wahhabism or Salafism.

Roman Catholics represent the largest Christian religious group. Most Protestants are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups. Small Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses communities also are present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government bans certain Muslim groups and indirectly monitors Islamic activities through the High Council for Islamic Affairs, an independent religious organization. The Constitution provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, some policies favor Islam in practice.

A committee composed of members of the High Council for Islamic Affairs and the Directorate of Religious and Traditional Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior organizes trips to Mecca for Hajj and Umra.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all religious groups or denominations equally, some non-Muslims allege that Muslims receive preferential status, particularly concerning use of public lands for building places of worship.

The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs oversees religious matters. Working under the Minister of the Interior, the Director is responsible for arbitrating intercommunal conflicts, reporting on religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom. The High Council for Islamic Affairs oversees Islamic religious activities, including the supervision of some Arabic language schools and higher institutions of learning and the representation of the country in international Islamic meetings.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs, in coordination with the President, also has the responsibility of appointing the grand imam, a spiritual leader for Muslims, who oversees each region's high imam and serves as head of the council. In principle, the grand imam has the authority to restrict proselytizing by other Islamic groups, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and exert control over activities of Islamic charities.

Religious leaders are involved in managing the country's wealth. A representative of the religious community sits on the Revenue Management College, the body that oversees the allocation of oil revenues. The seat rotates between Muslim and Christian leaders every four years. At the end of the reporting period, a Muslim religious leader held the seat.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas Day. It is common for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities.

The Government requires religious groups, excepting indigenous groups but including foreign missionary groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Registration takes place without discrimination and is interpreted as official recognition. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, registration is not intended to confer tax preferences or other benefits on religious groups.

The Government prohibits activity that "does not create conditions of cohabitation among the populations." This prohibition is understood to mean regulating groups who advocate actions that would heighten sectarian tensions.

The Government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits all religious groups to operate private schools without restriction. Many Arabic Islamic-culture schools are financed by foreign donors--governments, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals--particularly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Kuwait. The Government called for the closure of certain Qur'anic schools that compel children to beg for food and money.

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a private, voluntary basis, the Government is generally supportive of these initiatives. Government officials, including the President, regularly acknowledged the value of harmonious relations among religious groups and celebrated the country's religious diversity in public fora.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans Al-Mountada Al-Islami, the World Association for Muslim Youth, the Mecca Al-Moukarrama Charitable Foundation, and Al-Haramain Charitable Foundation for promoting violence to further religious goals.

The Government also bans Al Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Al Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group in the Kanem, Lake Chad, and Chari Baguirmi areas. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain Ulama (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Al Faid al-Djaria's customs, such as the incorporation of singing, dancing, and the intermixing of sexes during religious ceremonies, which they deem un-Islamic. However, the group carries out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region.

The July 2007 ban on all forms of street corner evangelization and preaching remained in effect; however, local organizations could apply for government permission to engage in such activities. The Government usually grants such permission.

The Government reportedly monitored some organizations, such as Ansar al-Sunna, that adhere to a more austere interpretation of Islam and receive significant foreign funding.

On December 18, 2008, the Ministry of the Interior released a decree requiring that the High Council for Islamic Affairs request prior authorization from the Ministry before it conducted outreach activities. The High Council accused the Government of partiality and ignored the decree.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to detain Sheikh Ahmet Ismael Bichara following the June 2008 confrontation in Kuono between security forces and Bichara's supporters that left 72 persons dead. The Government regarded the detention as justified under its prohibition of activity that "does not create conditions of cohabitation among the populations."

The Government released Abakar Brahim, who was arrested in February 2008 and accused of mobilizing Muslims to pray for the release of a prominent opposition leader.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion 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 was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between fundamentalist and moderate Muslims. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom during the reporting period.

On April 4, 2009, a building that was also used as a church was vandalized and burned down in Biltine. There was no police investigation or reported suspects, and the motive remained unclear.

Religious groups met regularly to try to resolve sources of tension and promote greater collaboration. During these encounters, leaders discussed issues of peaceful cohabitation, tolerance, and respect for religious freedom. During the March 2009 celebration of International Women's Week, women representing many religious groups called for more tolerance and peaceful cohabitation between Islam and Christianity. An ecumenical prayer service held in Koumra called for greater peace and justice in the country.

There continued to be reports of tensions within the Muslim community between leaders of the High Council for Islamic Affairs and some more fundamentalist groups regarding interpretations of practices, preaching, and the leading of prayers.

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. The Embassy continued a wide variety of outreach programs with the grand imam, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and other imams to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

In October 2008 the Embassy arranged a well attended series of discussions on "Islam in America" by American cleric Imam Yahya Hendi that emphasized the importance of religious pluralism and freedom.