Chad

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; at times, however, the Government limited this right for certain groups.

The Government continued to ban certain religious organizations and practices.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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 practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs or have no religion. Most northerners practice Islam, and many southerners practice Christianity or traditional indigenous religious beliefs; however, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas.

The great majority of Muslims belong to the Sufi brotherhood Tijaniyah. A small 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 denomination. Most Protestants are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups. Small Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses communities also are present.

Section II. Status of 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. 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. In the past the Association of Evangelical Churches criticized government-sponsored Hajj trips as eroding the traditionally secular stance of the country.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all religious groups or denominations equally, 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 of Religious and Traditional Affairs is responsible for arbitrating intercommunal conflicts, reporting about religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom. An independent religious organization, 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. The current grand imam, Sheikh Hissein Hassan Abakar, a representative of the Tijaniyah brotherhood, is viewed as a generally moderate religious figure. His authority has been challenged by followers of other orders of Islam who adhere to more fundamentalist teachings derived from eastern and northern Africa and the Middle East.

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 4 years. During the period covered by this report, the Christian representative handed responsibilities over to a Muslim religious leader designated by the Muslim community.

The Government requires religious groups, excepting traditional 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 commonly understood to be financed by foreign donors (governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals), particularly from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Kuwait. The Government calls for the closure of certain Qur'anic schools that compel children to beg for food and money.

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

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a private, voluntary basis, the Government is generally supportive of these initiatives.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to ban certain religious organizations and practices.

On July 10, 2007, the Mayor of N'djamena issued a ban on all forms of "street-corner" evangelization and preaching.

The Government continued a ban implemented in May 2006 of 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 continued to ban Al Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Al Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group found 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 deemed un-Islamic. The group still carried out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.
The Government reportedly monitored some organizations, such as the Salafi/Wahhabi group Ansar al Sunna, that adhere to a more austere interpretation of Islam and receive significant foreign funding.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On June 29, 2008, during a confrontation in Kuono between security forces and militant supporters of Sheikh Ahmet Ismael Bichara, approximately 72 persons were killed, including an estimated 68 supporters of Bichara.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion 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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, although 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.

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.

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. These dialogues were usually initiated by the Commission for Peace and Justice, a Catholic organization, and both Christian and non-Christian groups participated.

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.

The Embassy hosted an iftar dinner which brought together Muslims, Christians, and Baha’is.

Released on September 19, 2008

International Religious Freedom Report Home Page

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at http://www.state.gov maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.