

# COTE D'IVOIRE 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social and religious leaders made concerted efforts to promote religious freedom and encourage interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officials engaged with local religious and civil society leaders regularly throughout the year and organized events to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

## Section I. Religious Demography

According to the World Bank's 2011 country data report, the population is 20.2 million. Approximately 35 to 40 percent is Muslim, a roughly equal percentage is Christian, and an estimated 25 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Many Christians and Muslims also adhere to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Traditionally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity, although practitioners of both religions live throughout the country. In general, political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Harrists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Southern Baptists, Copts, and members of the Assemblies of God.

Other religious groups include Buddhists, Bahais, adherents of the Celestial Church of Christ, followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Bossonists, who follow traditions of the Akan ethnic group.

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### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

#### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Interior's Department of Faith-Based Organizations is responsible for promoting religious freedom in the country.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the government. Groups must submit an application to the Department of Faith-Based Organizations. The application must include the group's by-laws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding, and general assembly minutes. The department investigates the organization to ensure that the group has no members or purpose it deems to be politically subversive.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Mawlid al-Nabi, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, Laylat al-Qadr, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

#### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government continued to fund and organize Hajj pilgrimages for Muslims and pilgrimages to Israel and Lourdes for Christians. The government's role in determining which groups received subsidies for religious trips remained a controversial if minor political issue.

The administration reportedly provided equal access to state-run television and radio for religious programming.

The government included prominent Muslim and Catholic religious leaders in reconciliation efforts. The country's acknowledged Muslim leader, Cheick Boikary Fofana, and Catholic Archbishop Paul-Simeon Ahouana continued to serve as active members of the Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission, along with other religious leaders.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

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

Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and tolerance. Religious leaders organized public interfaith activities and issued joint statements to promote national reconciliation and tolerance. In July a group of Christian clergy and Muslim imams organized a peace and reconciliation soccer match. In September high profile religious leaders explicitly urged a calm response to an amateur video that many perceived as insulting to Muslims, and there were no conspicuous protests. In October an imam invited a Catholic bishop to be an honored guest for Eid al-Adha prayers at his mosque.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

Embassy officials met regularly with local religious and civil society leaders to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. On August 22, the embassy hosted a conference to discuss the role of Muslim women in reconciliation efforts. This program provided a forum to discuss how ordinary citizens could participate in the reconciliation process, stressing the importance of working with all ethnic and religious groups. On August 6, the ambassador hosted an iftar for 50 Muslim community leaders, Muslim employees of the U.S. embassy, and embassy staff.