



Equatorial Guinea

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

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 period covered by this report.

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 10,827 square miles and a population between 500,000 and 1 million. Christians account for approximately 93 percent of the population, of whom Roman Catholics comprise 87 percent and 6 percent belong to Protestant and independent denominations. Many Catholics reportedly also follow traditional beliefs. Five percent of the population practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims, Baha'is, and practitioners of other religious beliefs each constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The number of Muslims is increasing due to the growing number of West African and Middle Eastern immigrants.

Section II. Status of 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. However, the Government remains sensitive to criticism, and church leaders usually avoid discussions that could be construed as critical of the Government or government officials.

The Government generally allows preaching, religious teaching, education, and practice by believers. The Government requires religious groups to obtain permission for any activities outside the confines of places of worship; however, in practice this requirement does not appear to hinder organized religious groups from holding retreats and other meetings. Door-to-door evangelism reportedly occurred without incident.

A 1992 presidential decree regulates the exercise of religious freedom. This decree maintains an official preference for the Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea. While the decree does not hinder the practice of other religious beliefs, its effect can be observed in many events; for example, Catholic Masses serve as a normal part of any major ceremonial function, such as the October 12 National Day. In addition, Catholic and Reform church officials are exempt from airport entry and exit taxes.

The decree regulates the registration of religious groups. To register, churches must submit a written application to the Ministry of Justice, Worship, and Penitentiary Institutions. The Director General in the Ministry oversees compliance with the decree and the registration process. This application was not required of the Catholic and Reform churches.

The application and approval process may take several years, but such delay appears to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency and not of policy designed to impede any religious group. Groups that provide beneficial social programs, such as health projects or schools, reportedly are approved more quickly. Enforcement of registration requirements is inconsistent. Unregistered groups that operate can be fined. Such fines are rarely applied, but the Government periodically announced over the radio that any unregistered church was subject to fines or closure and should register as soon as possible.

Religious study is required in schools and is usually, but not exclusively, Catholic.

The fundamental law on religion states that each person is free to study his or her religion and should not be forced to study another faith. However, Catholic schools are the best available option for many students, and non-Catholics are expected to participate in daily Catholic lessons and prayers in those schools. Some Protestant denominations have their own schools.

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 period covered by this report.

In the past, the Government and President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) reacted defensively to any criticism by clergy. The Government continued unofficially to restrict freedom of expression of clergy by emphasizing that the role of religion is spiritual, not political.

Some non-Catholic pastors who also worked for the Government as civil servants reported that supervisors strongly encouraged participation in religious activities related to their government positions, including attending religious events such as Catholic Masses.

There were no confirmed reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country. On June 4, 2008, the Government released Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori, who had been held since 2003 for political reasons.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who were 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.

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 advocated for amnesty on behalf of Rev. Momesori and others imprisoned for political reasons.

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.