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Gabon

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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.

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 103,347 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. Approximately 73 percent of the population, including noncitizens, is Christian; 5 to 10 percent is Muslim (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practices animism exclusively; and 5 percent of the population is not religious. Many persons practice a syncretistic faith that combines elements of Christianity, traditional mystical faiths, Voodoo, or animism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. There were no formal or informal restrictions on the practice of religion.

The Ministry of Interior maintains an official registry of religious groups; however, it did not appear to grant registration to some small animist groups. The government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. Religious groups are exempt from land use and construction permit fees.

Registered religious groups are not automatically tax exempt and must complete an additional formal registration process to prove that they are nonprofit organizations to be exempt from tax requirements. If recognized as a religious organization but not eligible for not-for-profit status, a religious group is required to pay local taxes and customs duties on imports.

Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operated primary and secondary schools. These schools must register with the Ministry of Education, which is charged with ensuring these religious group-affiliated schools meet the same standards required for public schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Sunday and Monday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Kebir (Eid al-Adha), and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Action Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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 maintained contact with the minister of human rights, minister of interior, and various nongovernmental organizations to discuss the general state of religious freedom in the country.

The embassy made a specific effort to reach out to the Muslim community. The embassy enjoyed a strong working relationship with the Muslim community.

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