



Gabon

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

October 26, 2009

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 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, practices at least some elements of Christianity; 12 percent practices Islam (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practices animism exclusively; and 5 percent practices no religion. Many persons practice elements of both Christianity and animism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for 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. A 1970 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses remained in effect; however, the Government did not enforce the ban, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to assemble, practice, and proselytize.

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

The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official registry of religious groups; however, it does not appear to grant registration to all small, animist groups. The Government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. No financial benefit is conferred by registration. Religious groups are not taxed, can import duty-free items, and are exempted from land use and construction permit fees.

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

The Government promotes interfaith relations by facilitating meetings of leaders of major religious groups. Such meetings are rare, but informal discussions among religious leaders are routine.

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 reporting period.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

As in previous reporting periods, several mutilated corpses and body parts, suspected of having been connected with ritual killings by practitioners of animism, were found. No information was made public concerning investigations of these crimes.

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 and various nongovernmental organizations to discuss the general state of religion in the country, and the prevention of ritual crimes in particular.