



Gabon

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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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 103,347 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. Approximately 73 percent of the population, including noncitizens, practice at least some elements of Christianity; 12 percent practice Islam (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs exclusively; and 5 percent practice no religion. Many persons practice elements of both Christianity and traditional indigenous religious beliefs. The President is a member of the Muslim minority.

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. A 1970 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses remained in effect; however, the Government did not enforce the ban, and Jehovah's Witnesses continue to assemble, practice, and proselytize.

The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official registry of religious groups; however, it does not appear to grant registration to all small, indigenous religious groups. The Government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. No financial or tax benefit is conferred by registration, but 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 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.

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

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.

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 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.

Several mutilated corpses and body parts, suspected to have been used in ritual killings by practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, were found during the reporting period. No information was made public on the investigation of these crimes or concerning other investigations of ritual killings that occurred during the reporting period.

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.

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