



Guinea

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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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. Religious leaders continued to play critical roles in the national grassroots movement for constructive political change.

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 94,926 square miles and a population of 9.9 million. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent is Christian, and 5 percent holds traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims are generally Sunni; there are relatively few Shi'a, although they are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and other evangelical groups active in the country and recognized by the Government. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious groups among the expatriate community.

Some Muslims and Christians incorporate traditional indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices.

Muslims comprise a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the south, and in the eastern forest region. Christians also reside in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon region in the middle of the country, where Islam is deeply intertwined with Pular (or Fulani or Peuhl) culture and society. Traditional indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the forest region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high since traditional cultural rituals are often closely tied to religious practices. The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs estimates that more than 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

The country's significant immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same religious beliefs as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of traditional indigenous religious groups.

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.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of one's choice. To date, protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes.

The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, renamed in March 2007 from the Ministry of the National Islamic League, aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic and interreligious tensions. Although the Secretariat's leadership remains predominantly Sunni Muslim, the organization is developing positions for a National Director for Christian Affairs and a National Director for Islamic Affairs in an effort to increase collaboration and diminish friction between religious groups. However, the President of the Christian Council expressed concern for the Government's increasing involvement in religious affairs.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of the Interior and Security. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate in the country; however, they are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. In practice, no groups have been expelled.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Interior and Security, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. During the period covered by this report, all groups that submitted applications were registered.

The small Baha'i community practiced its faith openly and freely, although it was not officially recognized. The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs reported that the Baha'i community does not have headquarters in the country and have not requested official recognition.

There is a general tradition of Islamic schools throughout the country. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region, which was ruled as an Islamic theocracy during the 18th century.

There are a few scattered madrassahs across the country. The schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with foreign funds. The madrassahs are not formally linked with the public school system and are not recognized by the Government because they teach only Arabic and Islam. The Ministry of Education is trying to transform and integrate the madrassahs into the government-financed "Franco-Arab" system, which offers religious instruction in addition to a curriculum comparable to the public schools.

The Government continues to rejuvenate the Inter-Religious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. The Government invited all religious groups to participate in its civic education efforts and included different religious groups in its national prayers for peace.

The Government prohibits ownership of private radio and television by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned, commercial radio. The Government allocates 75 minutes per week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national television.

The Government observes Easter, Assumption Day, Christmas, Tabaski, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ramadan 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.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the Government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. For example, the universities close on Friday so Muslim students can go to mosque, but schedule

classes on Sunday, preventing Christian students from attending mass. The Secretariat General facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslim community, but did not provide any similar service to the Christian community.

The Government refrained from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country in deference to the strong social dominance of Islam in these regions. However, non-Muslims served in the cabinet, armed forces, and other sections of the administrative bureaucracy.

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. However, in some parts of the country, strong cultural, social, and economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. For example, the missionary community reported that a man's conversion from Islam to Christianity led to relatives taking his children and community rejection.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and senior religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Embassy sponsored a symposium entitled "Women of Action" where participants discussed the impact of Islam on their freedoms and made recommendations to support their ability to practice Islam and other religious beliefs in accordance with their personal conscience.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials raised religious freedom concerns with senior officials at the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, the senior imams of Conakry and Labe, and religious leaders outside the capital.

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