



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Burkina Faso

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 105,689 square miles, and its population is approximately 13.1 million. While exact statistics on religious affiliation were not available and varied widely according to a source, the Government estimated in its most recent census (1996) that approximately 60 percent of the population practiced Islam, the majority of whom belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam, while remaining minorities adhered to the Shi'a, Tidjania, or Wahhabi branches. The Government also estimated that 16.6 percent of the population practiced Roman Catholicism, approximately 3 percent were members of various Protestant denominations, and 23.7 percent exclusively or principally maintained traditional indigenous beliefs.

Statistics on religious affiliation were approximate because syncretistic beliefs and practices were widespread among both Christians and Muslims, many of whom incorporated indigenous beliefs and traditions into their practices. Additionally, the majority of citizens practiced traditional indigenous religions to varying degrees, and strict adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs was often nominal. Almost all citizens were believers in a supernatural order, making atheism virtually nonexistent.

Muslims were concentrated largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians were concentrated in the center of the country. Traditional religious practices were commonly found throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, had a mixed Muslim and Christian population; however, Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city, was mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities, found in the two main cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, were overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) Christian.

There were more than sixty different ethnicities in the country. Members of the dominant ethnic group, the Mossi, belonged to all three major religious groups (Christian, Muslim, and animist), while Fulani and Dioula communities were overwhelmingly Muslim. Smaller groups, such as the Lobi, were religiously heterogeneous as well.

Generally, there was little correlation between religion and political affiliation or economic status. Government officials belonged to all of the major religions, and religious affiliation appeared unrelated to membership in the ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, or any other political party.

Christian missionary groups were active in the country and included the Assemblies of God, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Baptists, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Mennonite Central Committee, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Pentecostal Church of Canada, the World Evangelical Crusade, the Society for International Missions, Seventh-day Adventists, and numerous Catholic organizations. Islamic missionary groups were also active in the country and included the African Muslim Agency, the World Movement for the Call to Islam, the World Islamic League, and Ahmadiyya.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous religions were practiced freely without government interference.

There is no official state religion, and the Government neither subsidized nor favored any particular religion. The practice of a particular faith

was not known to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

The Government has established the following religious holy days as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Ramadan, and Christmas Day. There was no evidence that these holidays had a negative effect on any religious group.

All organizations, religious or otherwise, were required to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status, but it entails no specific controls or benefits. According to article 45 of the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of approximately \$97 to \$292 (50,000 CFA to 150,000 CFA). All religious groups were given equal access to registration, which the Government routinely approved. Religious groups are taxed only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming and dairy production.

The constitution provides freedom of expression in publications and broadcasts, including those by religious groups, unless the judicial system determines that such expression is harming public order or committing slander; this has never occurred. The Government did not deny a publishing or broadcasting license to any religious group that requested one during the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations operated under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. Once a broadcast license is granted, for example, the Government regulates the operation of religious radio stations in accordance with the same rules that apply to commercial and state-run stations. The Ministry of Security has the right to request samples of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation. Additionally, there were no special tax preferences granted to religious organizations operating print or broadcast media.

Foreign missionary groups also operated freely and faced few, if any, restrictions. The Government neither forbade missionaries from entering the country nor restricted their activities; however, missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures in pursuit of particular activities.

Religious instruction was not offered in public schools; rather, it was limited to private schools and to the home. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operated primary and secondary schools. A total of 18 percent of elementary school students attended religious schools in the 2005-06 academic year, while 13 percent of secondary school students attended religious schools during the same period. Although school officials had to submit the names of their directors to the Government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the Government was never involved in appointing or approving these officials.

The Government did not fund any religious schools. Unlike other private schools, religious schools were not required to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. The Government reviewed the curriculum of such schools to ensure that religiously oriented schools offered the full standard academic curriculum found in all other schools. The Government, however, did not interfere with the curriculum of supplemental classes offered by private schools, such as classes on the Bible or the Qur'an.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In contrast with the previous report, there were no new reports that individuals were imprisoned or detained for refusing to allow their children to be inoculated against polio and measles on the grounds of religion. Residents of the village of Dar el Assane who had been arrested for resisting a national vaccination campaign in 2004 were released in early 2005 by law enforcement authorities. The Government did not follow through on the threat to charge them with child endangerment.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious tolerance is widespread as members of the same family often practice different religions.

The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity maintained a shelter in Ouagadougou for women forced to flee their villages because they were accused of being witches. Similar shelters financed by nongovernmental and religious organizations were also located in Ouagadougou.

During the period covered by this report, the World Health Organization and the National Committee for the Fight Against Excision reported that some persons in the country were performing female genital mutilation (FGM) on young girls in violation of the 1996 anti-FGM law forbidding the practice, which was considered by some Muslims to be a religious activity. Sometimes those persons used baptismal ceremonies as a cover for the mutilation because the baby was expected to cry during the ceremony.

Tensions existed between and within some Muslims groups due to leadership disputes; however, unlike in previous years, those tensions did not result in violent clashes within sectors of the Muslim community during the period covered by this report.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy and different Islamic organizations co-sponsored a number of workshops and public events discussing religious tolerance in the United States and promoting its continued practice locally. Activities also included a summer camp focusing on tolerance for children attending Qur'anic schools and discussions between Muslim-American employees of the embassy and local Muslim groups on the topic of religious diversity in the United States. The embassy also sent two young Muslim leaders to the United States on an International Visitor Program focusing on Muslim life in a democracy and provided scholarships to sixty Muslims students to learn English at the American Language Center. The embassy maintained contacts with representatives of all the major religious organizations.

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