



Chad

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, at times, the Government limited this right for certain groups.

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

The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, although some tensions across different Muslim groups and between Muslims and Christians were reported.

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 495,755 square miles and a population of approximately 9 million. Of the total population, more than half were Muslim, approximately one-third were Christian, and the remainder practiced traditional indigenous religions or no religion at all. Most northerners practiced Islam, and many southerners practiced Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion; however, population patterns were becoming more complex, especially in urban areas, and anecdotal evidence indicated that Muslim conversion was on the rise in areas that were previously Christian or animist. Many citizens, despite having stated religious affiliations, did not practice their religion regularly.

The vast majority of Muslims were adherents of a moderate branch of mystical Islam (Sufism) known locally as Tijaniyah, which incorporates some local African religious elements. A small minority of the country's Muslims (5 to 10 percent) held more fundamentalist practices, which, in some cases, may be associated with Saudi-oriented belief systems such as Wahhabism or Salafism.

Roman Catholics represented the largest Christian denomination in the country. Most Protestants, including the Nigeria-based "Winners Chapel," were affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups. Members of the Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses religious communities also were present in the country. Both faiths were introduced after independence in 1960 and therefore were considered to be "new" religions in the country.

There were foreign missionaries representing both Christian and Islamic groups. Itinerant Muslim preachers primarily from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, also visited. Saudi Arabian funding generally supported social and educational projects and extensive mosque construction.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times government practices limited this right. The constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, a large portion of senior government officials were Muslim, and some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, under a recent decree, a government commission was made responsible for organizing the Hajj and the Umra.

The Hajj is organized by a committee composed of members of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, headed by the Grand Imam, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs, in the Ministry of the Interior. Through these channels, the Government and High Council for Islamic Affairs have direct and close contacts with Saudi officials throughout the organizing period each year. Additionally, government journalists are often sponsored by the Government to cover the event in Mecca.

In addition to organizing the Hajj and the Umra, the Government annually sponsors Hajj trips to Mecca for certain officials. In February 2006 the Association of Evangelical Churches sent a memorandum to the Government criticizing this and other practices as eroding the traditionally secular stance of the country; however, the Government did not respond to the memorandum.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all faiths or denominations equally, Islamic congregations continued to be viewed as having preferential status, particularly when requesting official clearance or permission for certain activities.

Non-Muslim religious leaders also claimed that Muslim officials and organizations received greater support from the Government. In the past,

the Government reportedly accorded public lands to Muslim leaders for the purpose of building mosques, while representatives of other faiths were required to purchase land at market rates to build places of worship.

Religious matters are overseen by the director of religious and traditional affairs. Working under the minister of the interior, the director of religious and traditional affairs is responsible for arbitrating inter-communal conflicts and ensuring religious freedom. The director also monitors religious practices within the secular state. An independent religious organization, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, oversees all Islamic religious activities in the country, including the supervision of Arabic language schools and higher institutions, the representation of the country in international Islamic meetings, and coordination of the Hajj.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs, in coordination with the country's president, also has the responsibility of appointing the grand imam--a spiritual leader for all Muslims in the country who oversees each region's high imam (a regional Muslim leader) and serves as head of the council.

When President Deby came to power in 1990, he dissolved the former High Council for Islamic Affairs, formed a new council, and appointed the current grand imam, Sheikh Hassan Hissein Abakar, a representative of the generally moderate Sufi (Tijaniyah) branch of Islam. In principle, the grand imam has the authority to restrict proselytizing by other Islamic groups throughout the country, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and exert control over activities of Islamic charities operating in the country. Viewed as a generally moderate, pro-Western religious figure, Grand Imam Abakar has had his authority challenged by followers of other sects of Islam who adhere to more fundamentalist teachings derived from eastern and northern Africa and the Middle East.

In addition to religious matters, religious leaders are also involved in managing the country's wealth. A representative of the religious community sits on the Revenue Management College, the body that oversees the allocation of oil revenues. The seat rotates between Muslim and Christian leaders every three years. In 2004 the Muslim representative handed responsibilities over to a Catholic priest designated by the Christian community.

The Government requires religious groups, including both foreign missionary groups and domestic religious groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Department of Religious Affairs. Since 2004 registration has taken place without discrimination and been interpreted as official recognition. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, registration is not intended to confer tax preferences or other benefits to religious groups.

Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries continued to proselytize in the country. Generally, foreign missionaries did not face restrictions; however, they must register and receive authorization from the Ministry of Interior to circulate within the country, as do other foreigners traveling and operating throughout the country. There were no reports that authorization was withheld from any group.

Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools; however, all religious groups were permitted to operate private schools without restriction. The poor quality of Chad's educational system has prompted many Muslim families to look to Islamic schools as an opportunity for educating children who would otherwise have little or no access to formal schooling. Most large towns have at least one or two private religious schools. Although the Government does not publish official records on school funding, many Islamic schools were commonly believed to be financed by Arab donors (governments, NGOs, and individuals), particularly from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia. Egypt also provided a number of Egyptian teachers for Islamic educational institutions operating at the high school and university level in N'djamena and Abeche. Libya was also known to financially support teachers at Qur'anic and Arab-language schools throughout the country.

Among the numerous private radio stations, several stations broadcasting throughout the country were owned by religious organizations (six Christian and two Islamic). Radio stations run by both nonprofit and commercial groups were subject to close official scrutiny.

The Government celebrates both Christian and Islamic holy days as national holidays. Islamic national holidays include Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr. Christian holidays include Easter Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day.

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a voluntary basis and not through government intervention, the Government was generally supportive of these initiatives.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Al Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Al Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group that adheres to a mystical form of Islam and is found in the Kanem, Lake Chad, and Chari Baguirmi areas, continued to be banned during the period covered by this report. The group arrived in the country from Nigeria and Senegal and incorporates singing and dancing into its religious ceremonies and activities. Male and female members of the group freely interact with one another during religious gatherings. The director of religious and traditional affairs, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain Ulema (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Al Faid al-Djaria's customs, such as the incorporation of singing, dancing, and the intermixing of sexes during religious ceremonies, which they deemed un-Islamic. The minister of interior banned the group in 1998 and again in 2001. The 2001 ban (which was implemented on the technical grounds that the group did not have by-laws or basic statutes) denied the group's registration request and led to Al Faid al-Djaria's filing of a case against the Government. During this reporting period, the ban on Al Faid al-Djaria continued as the group's case continued in court, and the group carried out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Several human rights organizations reported on the problem of the *mahadjirin* children. Qur'anic teachers force these children, who attended certain Islamic schools, to beg for food and money. There were no credible estimates as to the number of *mahadjirin* children; however, UNICEF included these children in its child protection efforts. In September 2005 French television broadcast a program on the situation of the *mahadjirin* children, who testified in one case that they were chained and beaten. After this broadcast, the High Council for Islamic Affairs appealed for an immediate end to such practices, and the Government called for the closure of such schools. Despite these attempted reforms, the schools remained open during the reporting period.

The Government also remained concerned about some Islamic organizations, such as the Wahhabist group Ansar al Sunna, which were well funded by Arab donors and able to use money and other material incentives to encourage adherence to their more austere interpretation of Islam.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion 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

Although the different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, there was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between more fundamentalist and more moderate Muslims. During the year there were regular meetings between key religious leaders to discuss peaceful collaboration among their groups.

The publication of Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad had a particularly negative impact on Muslim-Christian relations in the country. On February 11, 2006, the president of the High Council for Islamic Affairs led a demonstration of several thousand Muslims to protest the publication, by a Danish newspaper, of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad perceived as derogatory and blasphemous. While the demonstration was intended to be peaceful, some demonstrators damaged a school and bookstore belonging to a Catholic Church, attacked an expatriate evangelical missionary, and burned her vehicle. The Catholic Church and Association of Evangelical Churches sent official protests to the Government for their failure to respond to the situation; however, they received no official response.

Muslim citizens appealed to the Government, asking it to ban all newspapers and press releases insulting Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. Some Muslims also recommended sanctions against Denmark. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not offered a response to Muslims' requests or made a public statement regarding its stance on the issue.

The marketplace violence in the southern town of Bebedja between Christians and Muslims that resulted in twelve dead and twenty-one wounded in 2004 remained a source of tension among the local populace. At the end of the reporting period, some of the twenty suspects originally detained were still in prison awaiting trial. Some victims contacted by human rights groups have accused the Government of failing to investigate the cases thoroughly and conduct proper trials.

There were reports of tensions within the Muslim community between the High Council for Islamic Affairs and radical elements within the community. Such tensions arose from differences between the leading Tijaniyahs and more fundamentalist groups regarding interpretations of proper practices, preaching, and the leading of prayers. Each group considered its interpretation of the Qur'an to be correct in terms of Islamic practices and teachings and contested other interpretations of Islam.

Most interfaith dialogues that attempted to address Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Muslim tensions were facilitated by the groups themselves and not through government intervention. During the reporting period, religious groups met regularly to try and resolve sources of tension and promote greater collaboration. During these encounters, leaders discussed problems of peaceful cohabitation, tolerance, and respect for religious freedom. While these dialogues were usually initiated by the Commission for Peace and Justice, a Catholic organization, both Christian and non-Christian groups participated.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of tension between Christians and Muslims in reaction to proselytizing by evangelical Christians.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In the period covered by this report, the ambassador met regularly with senior representatives of the Muslim and Christian faiths. In May 2006, for example, the ambassador traveled to Eastern Chad where he visited the high imam of Abeche and the sultan of Ouaddai, two of the most prominent and recently vested Muslim leaders in the country. During his visit, the ambassador described the embassy's outreach programs to the country's Muslims as a means for facilitating greater collaboration with the Muslim community. Additionally, the ambassador discussed the ongoing political instability in the region and requested the leaders' interpretation of the situation while emphasizing the U.S. government's desire to find a lasting peace for Sudan and its neighbors.

Embassy officers also meet with various religious leaders and groups during travel outside of the capital. Embassy officials, for example, attended the closing ceremony of a five-day training seminar on human rights for local imams and *marabouts*, personal spiritual leaders who often preside over small-scale religious ceremonies. Funded by the embassy, the seminar was organized by the Islamic Association for

Justice, a local nongovernmental organization, and trained approximately thirty religious leaders on topics such as religious freedom, women's rights, educational equality, and the rule of law.

In addition to meeting with religious and community leaders, the embassy also sponsored the visit of an U.S. Muslim leader who met with numerous religious, civil society, and academic groups. His visit gave an appreciation of the role religious freedom plays in providing peace and stability in diverse communities such as the United States.

Embassy relations with Muslim communities were also strengthened by the participation of Muslim leaders in the U.S. government's International Visitor Program. While focused on understanding U.S. societal, cultural, and political processes, this program also highlights the role of religion and religious tolerance in U.S. politics and society. Participants in the program included prominent Muslims such as the sultan of Abéché, the director of Radio Al Qur'an (a Muslim radio station owned by the High Council of Islamic affairs), and the principal of Ibnu Cina High School, a well-known Muslim school in the country.

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