



Guinea-Bissau

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. At the end of the reporting period, the legal status of Ahmadiyya remained uncertain after the Government's attempt in 2005 to ban the group.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 13,948 square miles and a population of 1,472,800. An estimated 38 to 45 percent of the population is Muslim, and 5 to 13 percent is Christian. The remainder of the population follows traditional indigenous or animist religious practices. There are few atheists.

Islam is practiced most widely by the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups, and Muslims generally live in the north and northeast. Virtually all Muslims are Sunni. The number of Ahmadi is extremely small and not confined to any particular geographic region. When the Government in 2005 attempted to ban Ahmadi activities, many adherents returned to practicing the same form of Sunni Islam that other Muslims in the country practice. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs generally live in all but the northern parts of the country. Christians belong to a number of groups, including the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated in Bissau and other large towns.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country without restriction.

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 generally sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. In March 2005 the Government took steps to ban the Muslim group Ahmadiyya. Members of the organization appealed the policy, and the legal status of the organization was not known by the end of the period covered by this report.

There is no state religion. Members of all major religious groups are represented in the national assembly.

Christmas is the only holy day considered a national holiday.

The Government requires that religious groups be licensed and reportedly did not refuse any applications. There were no reports that new applications were made during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Ahmadi continued to practice their faith despite their unclear legal standing resulting from the Government's attempt in March 2005 to prohibit Ahmadiyya religious practice.

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 belief or practice. Society is generally tolerant in religious matters; however, a low literacy rate leaves many susceptible to misinformation and manipulation by local leaders and others.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since there is no U.S. Embassy in the capital Bissau, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, handles all official contact with the country.

The Embassy maintained relations with leaders of major religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and missionary groups in the country, including the National Islamic Council and the Catholic bishops. In September 2006 the Embassy sponsored an iftar dinner where embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with members of the Muslim community. The Embassy continued to seek opportunities to further the understanding of religious freedom in the United States through public diplomacy programs, such as the International Visitor Program and dissemination of publications promoting tolerance.

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