



U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Guinea-Bissau

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 little 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. However, in March 2005, the Government prohibited Ahmadiyya activity in the country.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. In 2005 a dispute between local Muslims and Ahmadis in the city of Gabu resulted in injuries to four Ahmadis. There has been no violence since.

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 its population is approximately 1.5 million. An estimated 38 to 45 percent of the population was Muslim; and between 5 and 13 percent was Christian. The remainder of the population followed traditional indigenous or animist religious practices. There were few atheists.

Christians belonged to a number of groups, including the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations. Christians were concentrated in Bissau and other large towns. Islam was practiced most widely by the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups, and Muslims generally lived in the north and northeast. Practitioners of traditional religions inhabited the remainder of the country. Virtually all Muslims were Sunni. The Ahmadiyya were not confined to any particular geographic region. Their numbers were extremely small; there were no reliable data on number of adherents. With the 2005 banning of Ahmadiyya activities, followers had mostly returned to practicing the same form of Sunni Islam that other Muslims in the country practice.

Missionaries from numerous Christian denominations operated 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 sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. Members of all major faiths were 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 has not refused 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. However, in March 2005, following a dispute in the previous month between Muslims and members of the Ahmadiyya faith in the eastern city of Gabu, the Government prohibited Ahmadi activity, contending that Ahmadi activities, including the group's practice of paying locals to attend services, were disruptive.

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 religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society was generally tolerant on religious matters; however, a high illiteracy rate leaves many easily susceptible to misinformation and manipulation by local leaders and others.

In February 2005 a dispute between local Muslims and Ahmadis in the city of Gabu resulted in injuries to four Ahmadis before police intervened.

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 Bissau, the capital, the U.S. embassy in Dakar, Senegal, handled 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. Two Qur'anic schoolteachers have participated in the embassy's English Language Program and a third was scheduled for the summer of 2006. 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 Visitors Program and dissemination of publications promoting tolerance.

Released on September 15, 2006

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