



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Togo

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 21,925 square miles, and its population is estimated officially at 5.2 million. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004, stated that the population was approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consisted of various Christian (9.8 percent) and non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and persons not affiliated with any religious group (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continued to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country was unknown but estimated to be small.

Most Muslims lived in the central and northern regions of the country. Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians lived mostly in the southern regions.

Missionaries were active in the country and represent Assembly of God, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Muslim groups.

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. For instance, the Government voted in favor of the 2004 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which reaffirmed that freedom of religion is an inherent human right. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and two Islamic holy days as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan).

The Government recognizes three main faiths as state religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Other religions were required to register as associations. Official recognition as an association affords a group the same rights as the official religions. Officially recognized religious groups that conduct humanitarian and development projects receive tax benefits on imports but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Applications for registration must be submitted to the Ministry of Interior's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

The Government rejected the applications of a few religious groups based on activities deemed illegal or immoral. For example, the Government rejected the application of one Muslim group that it said was involved in supplying arms to northern Ghana. In another instance, the Government rejected the application of a Christian organization whose founders were accused of sexual harassment and embezzlement. Members of groups that were not officially recognized could practice their religion but did not have legal standing.

The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious

organization. For example, the Civil Security Division handles noise complaints made against religious organizations, particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Interior sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government has recognized more than 685 religious groups over the past fifteen years; although it is unknown how many of them still exist. Most new groups are small Protestant and Muslim congregations. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

The Muslim Union of Togo reported that since 1991, sixty-four Islamic groups had registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive funding from the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion and states explicitly that "no political party should identify itself with a region, an ethnic group, or a religion." There were no other laws or statutes that specifically restrict religious freedoms. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in the local and national Governments.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block off city streets. The requests were granted routinely during the period covered by this report.

Religious groups are generally left alone if they refrain from political activities and human rights issues, unless their opinions support the regime. Radio Maria, a popular station operated by a Catholic priest, has run afoul of the Government several times for airing criticism of the Government. The Government prevented Radio Maria from broadcasting for one month beginning April 25 because it erroneously reported the institution of a citywide curfew in Lome. Apparently in response to Radio Maria's repeated political commentary, the government-controlled media regulatory body, High Authority for Radio-Television and Communication, or HAAC (l'Haute Autorite de l'Audio-Visuel et de la Communication) issued a decree at the end of 2005 banning all political programs on community and religious radio and television stations. HAAC shut down the broadcast of a Radio Maria show featuring live political debate, and commission officials periodically warn the station when its programs stray too close to criticism of the regime.

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. Members of different faiths regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter-marriage between persons of different religions was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among Protestant denominations. The council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The council continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Unlike his predecessor, the Catholic archbishop of Lome continued to refrain from delivering political sermons in praise of President Eyadema. In January 2006 the archbishop presided over a government-sponsored service to honor the country's first president, overthrown by Eyadema. The holiday, falling for the first time after Eyadema's death, marks the date of the coup that began the Eyadema regime. During the service, the archbishop promoted reconciliation and peace, urging both sides to move toward a new chapter.

Since 2002 the Catholic Bishops' Conference has spoken on the need for credible, transparent elections, and it has criticized the Government for amending the constitution and electoral code and manipulating the National Election Commission. On April 17, 2005, just before the presidential election, the interim president met with several religious leaders. Among them was the archbishop of Lome, who said in a press conference after the meeting that he and his colleagues had urged the Government to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

The former archbishop of Lome was the chairman of a panel designed to rewrite the country's rocky political history. Following its release in late 2005, the public generally praised the final report, and it survived dissent from progovernment members of the panel.

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. The U.S. embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious diversity, values, and culture in the United States. The embassy also hosted a dinner for Muslim leaders and distributed thousands of publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The embassy included religious leaders, particularly Muslim leaders, in the International Visitor's Program and continued an English language study scholarship program for eighty underprivileged students, whose main beneficiaries were students of the Muslim faith. The two-year English language program contains regular segments on aspects of life in the United States, including religious tolerance.

Released on September 15, 2006

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