

Togo

Response to Information Request Number:	TGO99001.RIC
Date:	4 November 1998
Subject:	Togo: Information on the practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) among the Mina ethnic group
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Togo / Bodily integrity / Cultural identity / Customs and traditions / Female circumcision / Physical harm / Mutilation / Right to the security of the person / Traditional practices affecting women / Women

Query:

Is female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) practiced among the Mina ethnic group in Togo?

Response:

According to a 1997 State Department report on female genital mutilation (FGM) in Togo, FGM is not practiced by two of the largest ethnic groups in Togo, the Adja-Ewe and the Akposso-Akeou. The Mina are not among the groups listed which practice FGM in Togo. FGM tends to be limited to the Cotocoli, Tchamba, Peul, Mossi, Yanga, Moba, Gourma and Ana-lfe people of Togo. Women over 40 years of age are more likely to have undergone FGM, and the incidence of FGM is lower among educated women (*Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Togo* 28 Aug. 1997, 1). The Mina are related to the Ewe ethnic group and they are "prominent in Togo's commercial, intellectual and political life" (MRG 1997, 462-463). Information on whether the Ewe and the Adja-Ewe refer to the same group could not be found among the sources available to the RIC.

An official from the Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (BDRL) did not indicate with certainty that the Mina do not practice FGM, when interviewed by telephone. However, the DOS official indicated that the geographic location of the Mina and their relation to other ethnic groups which do not practice FGM makes it more unlikely that FGM is practiced among the Mina. The official stated, however, that there may be cases of intermarriage with other ethnic groups in Togo which would lead to a Mina woman undergoing FGM (U.S. DOS 31 Dec. 1997). This view is corroborated by an anthropology professor from the University of Michigan-Flint, who stated that the Mina do not practice FGM, but that they often inter-marry with the Fon ethnic group who do practice FGM (Rosenthal 21 Oct. 1998).

Although the government has not eradicated FGM in Togo, it has been supportive of efforts to do so. Human rights and women's rights groups in Togo have had limited success with outreach programs to educate rural populations about the dangers of FGM, and it is the view of Togolese activists that it will take a generation before a significant reduction in FGM takes place. There are no laws that outlaw FGM, and traditional custom is pervasive in Togo. The Ministry of Feminine Promotion and Social Affairs has indicated that in theory the Ministry would seek to protect any woman who claims abuse of her human rights, however there is no documented precedent of women seeking protection from FGM within Togo. The Togolese Human Rights League states that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may not be able to effectively protect a women against FGM

because it is considered "a family matter." The Togolese Gendarmerie generally do not intervene in traditional practices, but state that they could protect a woman who had won protection through the court system (*Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Togo* 28 Aug. 1997, 3-5).

On 29 October 1998 the Togolese Parliament passed a law banning FGM and setting prison terms or fines for those who carry out or encourage it. The sets the jail terms of two months to 10 years and fines of between 100,000 and one million cfa francs (Reuters 31 Oct.1998). Since the law was only passed very recently, it remains to be seen how it will be implemented and enforced in Togo in light of the cultural factors noted above.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Togo. 28 August 1997. Office of Asylum Affairs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (BDRL), U.S. Department of State (DOS). Washington, DC: U.S. DOS, Office of Asylum Affairs, BDRL.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG). 1997. *World Directory of Minorities*. London: Minority Rights Group International.

Reuters. 31 October 1998. "Togo Bans Female Genital Mutilation."

Rosenthal, Judy. University of Michigan-Flint. 21 October 1998. Electronic mail

U.S. Department of State (DOS), Office of Asylum Affairs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (BDRL). 31 December 1997. Telephone interview.

Last Modified 06/14/2002