



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

02 August 2007

GIN102575.E

Guinea: Intertribal marriages, especially between the Malinkes and the Peuls, and the perception of these marriages; state protection available to couples if parents oppose an interethnic marriage.
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Guinea is populated by several ethnic groups, each of which tends to live in a particular geographic area of the country (US Apr. 2007). The Peul, who comprise 38.7 percent of the population (Europa 2006), live in the Fouta Djallon highlands (US Apr. 2007). The Malinke, who make up 23.3 percent of the population (Europa 2006), generally inhabit the Savannah and forest regions (US Apr. 2007). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006*, "While the law prohibits racial or ethnic discrimination, ethnic identification was strong" in 2006 (6 Mar. 2007). *Country Reports 2006* also reports "relatively low levels of interethnic marriage" (US 6 March 2007).

An anthropologist who completed a doctoral dissertation on interethnic marriage in Guinea in 2005 commented on her work in correspondence with the Research Directorate (28 June 2007). The Anthropologist is a senior technical advisor with a United States-based firm that provides technical support and other services to international development projects in countries around the world, including in Africa (Initiatives 26 Feb. 2007).

The Anthropologist found that "while inter-ethnic and inter-status marriages continue to represent a small proportion of all marriages, they have become increasingly common" (28 June 2007). In particular, the Anthropologist found that marriage records revealed that interethnic marriages increased from 0 percent of all marriages in the 1930s to 17 percent of marriages in the 1990s (Anthropologist 28 June 2007).

With respect to the Peul tribe, the Anthropologist clarified in correspondence with the Research Directorate that "Fulbe is the term they use for themselves" (28 June 2007). The Anthropologist -- who focussed her research on interethnic marriages among the Fulbe (Peul) in the Fouta Djallon highlands -- observed that marriages between Malinke and Fulbe (Peul) represented about half of all interethnic marriages in the region (28 June 2007).

Regarding how interethnic marriages are perceived within Guinea, the Anthropologist made the following comments in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 28 June 2007.

[T]he way interethnic marriages are perceived in the country depends on the geography and population. These marriages may be more acceptable in urban than in rural areas, among the educated or social elite than among the poor (or in some cases among the poor and not the elite). Conakry, like many capital cities, is quite a melting pot. Some ethnic groups may be more accepting than others, although I cannot say much about any group besides the Fulbe.

[S]tatus is important in addition to ethnicity. A Malinke man of noble descent and a Peul [Fulbe] woman of noble descent may marry with little problem. There is actually a long history of these marriages. It is when there is a difference in social status -- a man or woman with artisan roots and a man or woman with noble or free roots -- that things become much more complicated. But again, this depends a lot on the families. A family with only one son may want to maintain ethnic and status homogeneity and may be very upset by the prospect of a non-Fulbe (or whatever) daughter-in-law. And there are, of course, a million other scenarios. I would not say that there is a general feeling among Fulbe that they should not marry Malinke or vice versa. Most of the people I spoke with felt that Malinke-Fulbe marriages were OK although a Fulbe-Fulbe marriage would be more desirable.

With respect to state protection, the Anthropologist said the following:

...[T]he Guinean state is so weak it is neither capable of enforcing existing laws nor protecting its citizens in any consistent or reliable manner. The fact of the matter is that the courts would/should uphold an interethnic union, but there would be no effective "protection" by the state per se, if by protection you mean restraining order or the like. The courts could call for one, but there would be little way of enforcing it.

The President of the Guinean Organization for Human Rights (Organisation guinéenne pour la défense des droits de l'homme, OGDH) provided the following information on the subject of interethnic marriages in a 3 June 2004 interview conducted by the Research Directorate. He indicated that mixed marriages do not usually cause serious problems, except in some families in which the man's or woman's parents oppose the marriage. Generally, problems arise when the couple is from different religions (Christianity and Islam) or social classes, rather than when they are from different ethnic groups. A couple that decides to get married despite family opposition risks being rejected by the family. Cases can occur in which the upset family member becomes violent. The President pointed out that when a parent who opposes a mixed marriage uses threats or violence, the problem is usually resolved within the family and the police do not become involved unless there are serious injuries. The President finished by saying that, in Guinea, more respect is given to customs than to the provisions of the penal code.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Anthropologist. 28 June 2007. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Europa World Online. 2006. "Guinea: Area and Population." <<http://www.europaworld.com/pub/>> [Accessed 4 July 2007]

_____. 2006. "Guinea: Recent History." <<http://www.europaworld.com/pub/>> [Accessed 4 July 2007]

Initiatives Inc. 26 February 2007. "About Us." <<http://www.initiativesinc.com/about/staff/indiaStaff.htm>> [Accessed 2 Aug. 27]

Organisation guinéenne pour la défense des droits de l'homme (OGDH). 3 June 2004. Telephone interview with the OGDH president.

United States (US). April 2007. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs. "Background Note: Guinea." <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2824.htm>> [Accessed 27 June 2007]

_____. 6 March 2007. Department of State. "Guinea." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78738.htm>> [Accessed 27 July 2006]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International, British Broadcasting Corporation, Human Rights Watch, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Freedom House, Global Security, government of Guinea.

Publications, including: *Africa Research Bulletin*, *Africa Confidential*.

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.