



## Burkina Faso

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects 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 religions 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 105,689 square miles, and its population is approximately 12.8 million. There is no single dominant religion. Exact statistics on religious affiliation are not available; however, the Government estimates that approximately 55 to 60 percent of the population practices Islam, approximately 16 to 20 percent practices Roman Catholicism, approximately 5 percent are members of various Protestant denominations, and 23 to 25 percent exclusively or principally practice traditional indigenous religions. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because syncretistic beliefs and practices are widespread among both Christians and Muslims. A majority of citizens practice traditional indigenous religions to varying degrees, and adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs is often nominal. Almost all citizens are believers in a supernatural order, and atheism is virtually nonexistent. The large majority of the country's Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, while minorities adhere to the Shi'a, Tidjania, or Wahhabi branches.

Muslims are concentrated largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Traditional indigenous religions are practiced widely throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city, is mostly Muslim. There is a small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant community, whose members are overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) Christian.

Members of the dominant ethnic group, the Mossi, belong to all three major religions. Fulani and Dioula groups overwhelmingly are Muslim. There is little correlation between religion and political affiliation or economic status. Religious affiliation appears unrelated to membership in the ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, or any other political party. Government officials belong to all of the major religions.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country and include the Assemblies of God, the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Christian Missionary Alliance, Baptists, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Mennonite Central Committee, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Pentecostal Church of Canada, the World Evangelical Crusade, the Society for International Missions, Seventh-day Adventists, and numerous Roman Catholic organizations. Islamic missionary groups active in the country include the African Muslim Agency, the World Movement for the Call to Islam, the World Islamic League, and Ahmadia.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous religions are practiced freely without government interference. There is no official state religion, and the Government neither subsidizes nor favors any particular religion. The practice of a particular faith is not known

to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

The Government has established the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Ramadan, and Christmas Day. There is no evidence that these holidays have a negative effect on any religious group.

The Government requires that religious groups register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status, but it entails no specific controls or benefits. There are no penalties for failure to register. All groups are given equal access to registration, and the Government routinely approves registrations. Religious groups are taxed only if they engage in lucrative activities, such as farming.

The law provides religious groups freedom of expression in their publications and broadcasts unless the judicial system determines that they are harming public order or committing slander; this has never occurred. The Ministry of Security grants publishing licenses, and the Superior Council of Information (CSI) grants broadcasting licenses. The Government has never denied a publishing or broadcasting license to any religious group that has requested one. The procedures to apply for publishing and broadcasting licenses are the same for both religious groups and commercial entities. Applications are first sent for review to the Ministry of Information and then forwarded to the Ministry of Security. If the Government does not respond to the application for a publishing license within the required timeframe, the applicant may begin publishing automatically.

Applicants for radio licenses must wait until the Authority for the Regulation of Telecommunications (ARTEL) assigns a frequency and determines that the group's broadcasting equipment is of a professional quality before beginning broadcasts. The Ministry of Security has the right to request samples of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation. In the case of radio stations, the CSI must be informed of the name of the broadcasting director as well as of the general programming content. Once the broadcast license is granted, the Government regulates the operation of religious radio stations in accordance with the same rules that apply to commercial and state-run stations. Stations must show that their workers are employed full-time, that ARTEL has been paid for the use of assigned frequencies, and that employee social security taxes and intellectual property fees have been paid. There were no special tax preferences granted to religious organizations operating print or broadcast media.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely and face no special restrictions. The Government neither forbids missionaries from entering the country nor restricts their activities; however, missionary groups occasionally face complicated bureaucratic procedures in pursuit of particular activities. For example, some Christian medical missionaries have difficulty operating in the country because of a partial restriction on foreign physicians. The restrictions are not aimed at religious groups.

Religious instruction is not offered in public schools; it is limited to private schools and to the home. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. The Government monitors both the nonreligious curriculum and the qualifications of teachers employed at these schools. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the Government, the Government never has been involved in appointing or approving these officials. The Government does not fund any religious schools. Unlike other private schools, religious schools pay no taxes if they do not conduct any lucrative activities. The Government reviews the curriculum of such schools to ensure that religiously oriented schools offer the full standard academic curriculum.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, in December 2004, security forces and local authorities forcibly vaccinated children in two villages. Members of two small religious communities, the "Sunnites" in Dar El Assane and "Les Pieds Nus" in Médine in Kenedougou Province, refused to allow their children to be inoculated against polio and measles. "Les Pieds Nus" opposed these vaccinations, arguing that they are "products made by white people" who are their "worst enemies." The Sunnites argued that the vaccinations interfered with the will of God. In Médine, police searched each home to find hidden children who were then vaccinated by medical personnel. In Dar El Assane, "Les Pieds Nus" stopped resisting when the local police authorities arrived. However, on May 18, the police returned for another round of vaccinations and carried out the forced vaccination of 110 children. A number of adult residents of the village were arrested and are still in police custody as of the writing of this report. The adults have been charged with conspiring to endanger a person.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### **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.

### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

**Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious tolerance is widespread, and members of the same family often practice different religions.

The Ministry of Social Action and the Family maintains a shelter in Ouagadougou for women forced to flee their villages because they were suspected of being witches. Similar shelters financed by nongovernmental and religious organizations also are located in Ouagadougou, but older women forced from their villages are also commonly found as beggars in the streets of larger cities.

During the period covered by this report, the World Health Organization and the National Committee for the Fight Against Excision reported that some persons in the country are performing female genital mutilation on young girls in violation of the law forbidding the practice. Sometimes these persons use baptism ceremonies as a cover for cutting out the clitoris because the baby is expected to cry during the ceremony.

Tensions exist between and within some Muslims groups due to leadership disputes. Unlike in previous years, those tensions did not result in violent clashes within sectors of the Muslim community during the period covered by this report.

**Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Embassy and different Islamic organizations co-sponsored a number of workshops and public events discussing religious tolerance in the United States, and promoting its continued practice here. Muslim-American employees of the Embassy discussed religious diversity in the United States with local Muslim groups. The Embassy also sent a journalist on an International Visitor Program concerning Muslim life in a democracy; the participant subsequently wrote a series of articles on religious tolerance. The Embassy maintains contacts with the majority Islamic community and other minority communities such as Christians and animists.

Released on November 8, 2005

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