



Chad

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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

The Constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times the Government limited this right for a number of groups in certain situations.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, although tensions between Christians and Muslims continued. In October 2004, there was marketplace violence between Christians and Muslims that resulted in 12 dead and 21 wounded.

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 495,755 square miles, and its population is approximately 9 million. Of the total population, 54 percent are Muslim, approximately one-third are Christian, and the remainder practice traditional indigenous religions or no religion at all. Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion; however, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas. Many citizens, despite stated religious affiliation, do not practice their religion regularly.

The vast majority of Muslims are adherents of a moderate branch of mystical Islam (Sufism) known locally as Tidjani, which originated in 1727 under Sheik Ahmat Tidjani in present-day Morocco and Algeria. Tidjani Islam, as practiced in the country, incorporates some local African religious elements. A small minority of the country's Muslims (5 to 10 percent) are considered fundamentalist.

Roman Catholics are the largest Christian denomination in the country; most Protestants are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups.

Adherents of two other religions, the Baha'i faith and Jehovah's Witnesses, also are present in the country. Both faiths were introduced after independence in 1960 and therefore are considered to be "new" religions. Because of their relatively recent origin and their affiliation with foreign practitioners, both are perceived as foreign.

A representative of the religious community sits on the Revenue Management College, the body that oversees the allocation of oil revenues. The seat rotates between Muslim and Christian leaders every 3 years. In 2004, the Muslim representative handed responsibilities over to a Catholic priest designated by the Christian community.

There are foreign missionaries representing both Christian and Islamic groups. Itinerant Muslim imams also visit, primarily from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times the Government limited this right. The Constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, a large portion of senior government officials are Muslim, and some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, the Government sponsors annual Hajj trips to Mecca for certain officials.

The Government requires religious groups, including both foreign missionary groups and domestic religious groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Religious Affairs. Registration confers official recognition but does not confer any tax preferences or other benefits. There are no specific legal penalties for failure to register, and there were no reports that any group had failed to apply for registration or that the registration process is unduly burdensome.

Foreign missionaries do not face restrictions but must register and receive authorization from the Ministry of Interior, as do other foreigners traveling around the country. There were no reports that authorization was withheld from any group. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries proselytize in the country.

The Government celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays. Muslim national holidays include Eid al-Adha (February), the Prophet Muhammed's birthday (May), and Eid al-Fitr (November). Christian holidays include Easter Monday (April), All Saints' Day (November), and Christmas Day (December).

Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools. All religions are permitted to operate private schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Islamic religious group Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group that adheres to a mystical form of Islam, continued to be banned during the period covered by this report. The group arrived in the country from Nigeria and Senegal and incorporates singing and dancing into its religious ceremonies and activities. Male and female members of the group freely interact with one another during religious gatherings. The group is found from the Kanem region around Lake Chad into neighboring Chari Baguirmi. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs, the Superior Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain ulama (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Faid al-Djaria's religious customs, which they deemed un-Islamic. The Minister of Interior banned the group in 1998 and again in 2001. The 2001 ban was implemented on technical grounds, and the Government did not recognize the group's registration. In 2004, the ban continued and the group's case was still in court. The group still carries out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.

While the Government treats most faiths or denominations equally, Islamic congregations appear to have an easier time obtaining official permission for their activities. Non-Islamic religious leaders also claim that Islamic officials and organizations receive greater tax exemptions and unofficial financial support from the Government. In the past, the Government reportedly accorded public lands to Islamic leaders for the purpose of building mosques, while other religious denominations must purchase land at market rates to build places of worship. Recently, however, the Government has attempted to balance requests for tax exemptions and land requests between Christian and Muslim groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government has imprisoned and sanctioned fundamentalist Islamic imams believed to be promoting conflict among Muslims; however, several of these imams continue to preach. Imam Sheikh Mahamat Marouf, a fundamentalist Islamic leader from Abeche, continued to be legally prohibited from leading prayers; however, he continued to preach without restriction. His followers were allowed to pray in their mosques, but the Government continued to forbid them from debating religious beliefs in any way that might be considered proselytizing (viewed as a threat to public order).

Several human rights organizations reported on the problem of the "mahadjir" children. Qur'anic teachers force these children, who attended certain Islamic schools, to beg for food and money. There were no real estimates as to the number of mahadjir children; however, UNICEF included these children in a recent study and in its child protection efforts. The Government held a meeting to sensitize community leaders to the issue in May 2004.

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 different religious communities generally coexisted without problems; however, on October 30, 2004, there was marketplace violence in the southern town of Bebedja between Christians and Muslims that resulted in 12 dead and 21 wounded. Police arrested approximately 20 persons. At the end of the reporting period the suspects remained in detention at a Ndjamenia prison pending conclusion of an investigation and referral of the case to a grand jury for possible indictments.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of tension between Christians and Muslims in reaction to proselytizing by

evangelical Christians.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reported acts of vandalism against churches. In 2003, a church in the predominantly Muslim town of Abeche was burned; it was the most serious event in a series of acts of vandalism against the church. The Church of Christian Assemblies in Chad (ACT) had built the structure following a land dispute with Abeche's Islamic Affairs Committee that dates back several years. In 2004, the Government gave new land to ACT to resolve the issue.

Most interfaith dialogue happens on an organizational level and not through government intervention.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In the period covered by this report, the Embassy sponsored a well-received 2-week speaker's program which featured an American imam who met with numerous religious, civil society, and academic groups. He promoted dialogue between religious groups and among Muslims and discussed women's rights under Islam. The Ambassador also hosted an Iftar for Muslim leaders during Ramadan.

Embassy officials have continued to increase their outreach efforts, particularly among Muslim leaders, communities, and groups, including various trade associations, Arab-speaking journalists, and youth and women's groups. As part of this strategy, the Embassy donated books and posters regarding Islam in America to key Muslim leaders and to local schools. The Embassy also expanded English-language learning opportunities to a Muslim university and a local mosque. Seventy-five micro-scholarships were given to underserved populations, including Muslim children. In addition, the Embassy has worked with Arabic-speaking women's associations, parent-teacher organizations, and journalists. Embassy officers also meet with various religious leaders and groups during travel outside of the capital. Prominent Muslim leaders participated in U.S. Government-sponsored International Visitor Programs that focused on teaching American politics and understanding U.S. societal, cultural, and political processes.

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