



## Senegal

### 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 76,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 10 million. According to current government demographic data, Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 94 percent of the country's population. Most citizens practice a syncretic form of Islam, combining formal religious practices with traditional cultural beliefs and values. There also is an active Christian community (4 percent of the population) that includes Roman Catholics, Protestant denominations, and syncretic Christian-animist groups. The remainder of the population, an estimated 2 percent, practices exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion.

The country is ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there is significant integration of all groups, there are geographic concentrations of some religious groups. The Christian minority is concentrated in the western and southern regions, while groups that practice traditional religions are mainly in the eastern and southern regions. Immigrants practice the same faiths as native-born citizens.

A wide variety of foreign missionary groups operate, including Catholics, Protestants, independent missionaries, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### 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.

There is no state religion; the Constitution specifically defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided that public order is maintained.

The importance of religion in the country often resulted in the Government giving direct financial and material assistance to religious organizations. There is no official system of distribution for these grants which are often provided to assist religious groups to maintain or rehabilitate their places of worship or undertake special events. All religions have access to these funds. During the period covered by this report, the Government provided funds and technical assistance to rehabilitate churches throughout the country, including Dakar's national cathedral. The Government provides security personnel and enhanced public services to support national religious pilgrimages, both Christian and Muslim.

The Government observes a number of Muslim and Christian holy days. Muslim holy days observed are Tabaski, Tamkharit, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, and Korite. Christian holy days observed are Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day and Christmas.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without government interference; however, the civil and commercial code requires any group, religious or otherwise, to register with the Minister of the Interior to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enables an association to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups, including all registered nonprofit organizations, are exempt from many forms of taxation. Registration generally is granted and the Minister of Interior must have a legal basis for refusing registration.

Missionaries, like other long-term visitors, must obtain residence visas from the Ministry of Interior. Christian and Islamic groups often establish a presence as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious NGOs obtain permission to operate from the Minister of the Family, Social Action, and National Solidarity. There were no reports that the Government refused visas or permission to operate to any group. Religious NGOs are very active in providing social services and administering economic development assistance programs.

In 2002, the Government passed a law that allows public schools to offer 2 hours of religious education, both Islamic and Christian, per school week through a pilot program. Religious teaching is an optional part of the curriculum, and students are not required to participate. Privately owned schools are free to provide religious education. The Ministry of Education provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. Christian schools, which have a long and successful experience in education, receive the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools are Muslims.

The Government encourages and assists Muslim participation in the Hajj every year. It also provides similar assistance for an annual Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican. After Pope John Paul II's death, the Government sent a delegation to attend his funeral that included senior government officials and leaders in the Christian community.

While there is no specific government-sponsored institution to promote interfaith dialogue, the Government generally seeks to promote religious harmony by maintaining relations with the larger religious groups. Senior government officials regularly consult with religious leaders, and the Government generally is represented at all major religious festivals or events. In April 2005, the Government held a summit to prepare for a conference on Islamic-Christian cooperation and harmony at which President Wade, Prime Minister Macky Sall, and other government leaders were present, along with delegations from several foreign countries. During the summit, President Wade spoke about the peaceful coexistence of religions in the country, a source of national pride. A larger Islamic-Christian summit was scheduled for December 2007. During the period covered by this report, the Government's High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the U.N. Human Rights Commission about the importance of religious tolerance.

The Government actively promoted religious tolerance among its citizens. When anonymous threats were made against members of the Christian clergy in early 2004, the Government quickly denounced the threats and assured the protection of Christian leaders.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Majority and minority religious leaders conduct their activities and speak out on social and political issues, such as political violence and HIV/AIDS, without fear of government sanction. The Government monitors foreign missionary groups and religious NGOs to ensure that their activities coincide with their stated objectives.

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.

Religion plays an important role in the lives of most citizens, and society generally is very open to and tolerant of different religious faiths. The country has a long tradition of amicable and tolerant coexistence between the Muslim majority and Christian, traditional indigenous, and other religious minorities. Interfaith marriage is relatively common. Within certain families, other religious faiths, such as Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion, are practiced alongside Islam. There are a number of interfaith events throughout the year that celebrate the important role of religion in everyday life.

Islamic communities generally are organized around one of several brotherhoods, headed by a Khalif, who is a direct descendant of the group's founder. The two largest and most prominent of these brotherhoods are the Tidjanes, based in the city of Tivouane, and the Mourides, based in the city of Touba. At times there have been disputes within the different brotherhoods over questions of succession or general authority; however, relations generally have been peaceful and cooperative. In recent years, a National Committee to Coordinate Sightings of the Moon, and hence the designation of Muslim holy days, has been formed at the suggestion of the Government and effectively increased cooperation among the Islamic subgroups.

While the brotherhoods are not involved directly in politics or government affairs, these groups exert considerable influence in society and maintain a dialogue with political leaders. Close association with a brotherhood, as with any influential community leader, religious or secular, may afford certain political and economic protections and advantages that are not conferred by law.

Christian and Islamic leaders long have maintained a public dialogue with one another. During the period covered by this report, the death of a retired Cardinal who had championed interfaith harmony generated nationwide reflection and public discourse among Muslim and Christian communities on the importance of religious tolerance.

Unlike in the past, there were no cases of interfaith violence during the period covered by this report.

#### **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 and maintains relations with all major religious groups, including the Mouride, Tidiane, Lyssane, and Qadriyya Islamic brotherhoods and Christian groups. During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and other Embassy staff met with religious leaders or their representatives, many of whom had never met an American diplomat, to discuss social and political issues and demonstrate American interest in forging positive relationships with Islamic communities. The Embassy maintains contacts with several faith-based NGOs, foreign missionary groups, and human rights organizations and activists to monitor issues of religious freedom. The Ambassador or his representative regularly attends major annual religious festivals or gatherings to promote an open dialogue with various religious groups.

The U.S. Embassy has an active program of presenting information about religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The Embassy has translated, published, and distributed the "Muslim Life in America" brochure in the two major national languages (Wolof and Pulaar). The Embassy routinely released to the local press, posted on its website and published through a monthly magazine information on Islam in the United States, including statements from the President and the Secretary of State celebrating Ramadan and other Muslim holidays. During the period covered by this report, for example, the Embassy publicized the 10,000 Americans who participated in the most recent Hajj. In August 2004, the Embassy sent five English teachers on a program to the U.S. during which participants visited Muslim communities in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania to learn about interfaith relations. The Ambassador donated several hundred Arabic language books to the Al-Azhar Institute of Islamic Studies. In addition, the Embassy made many smaller donations to Islamic institutes, schools, and libraries.

The Embassy continued during Ramadan to host Iftars and deliver traditional gifts to religious leaders in recognition of their daily fasts. The media reported that the Embassy preceded its public programs with traditional Ramadan greetings. Similarly, President Bush's Ramadan message and Iftar reception were widely covered in all media.

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