

SIERRA LEONE 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious freedom with the government and with nongovernmental organizations including the Inter-Religious Council (IRC) and the Council of Imams. During Ramadan the Ambassador attended an iftar and a religious service and gave remarks on religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.6 million (July 2013 estimate). The IRC, which is composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, estimates that 77 percent of the population is Muslim and 21 percent Christian. Christians include Protestants, Roman Catholics, and others. Groups constituting less than 2 percent include Bahais, Hindus, Jews, and adherents of indigenous and other religious beliefs. Most Muslims are Sunni. Evangelical Christians are a growing minority, drawing members primarily from other Christian groups. Many persons combine Islam or Christianity with indigenous religious beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The constitution guarantees all citizens the freedom to observe their own religious practices and to change religions without interference from the government or members of other religious groups.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs is responsible for religious matters. Religious groups seeking recognition by the ministry, which results in such benefits as tax concessions, must complete a registration form.

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The government permits religious instruction in all schools. The government requires a standard Religion and Morals Education (RME) curriculum in all public schools through high school, which covers Christianity, Islam, and other religions. Private schools are not required to use RME, although many Christian schools do. Muslim schools generally do not use RME, asserting that it provides insufficient coverage of Islam. Instruction in a specific religion is permissible only in schools organized by religious groups.

Government Practices

There were no reports of significant government actions affecting religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The IRC worked in tandem with the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone, the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone (which represented many evangelical churches and denominations), and the United Council of Imams. These groups, funded by member contributions and donations from nongovernmental organizations, helped maintain harmony between Christians and Muslims, expressed support for peace and good governance, and provided development assistance and disaster relief without regard for religious affiliation.

Most churches and mosques registered with the Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship, or the United Council of Imams (which registered over 9,000 mosques.)

Religion did not play a role in either ethnic identity or political affiliation. Candidates for president have generally chosen a running mate of a different religion, although there was no requirement to do so.

Intermarriage among Christians and Muslims was common, and many families had both Christian and Muslim members living in the same household. Most citizens celebrated all religious holidays, regardless of sect or denomination, both at home and in houses of worship.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue on religious freedom with the government and with religious leaders and nongovernmental organizations, including the IRC and the Council of Imams. During Ramadan the Ambassador attended an iftar and religious service in the rural village of Ogoo Farm and gave remarks on religious tolerance.