

CHAD 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates separation of religion and state and provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits “denominational propaganda” that inhibits national unity. The president promoted religious tolerance through public statements.

Christian and Islamic groups comprising the Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue held their third annual day of prayer and pardon, which aimed to encourage interfaith collaboration and reduce violence, and met three times to promote religious tolerance. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant leaders initiated a platform to teach religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence to refugees and Chadian returnees from the Central African Republic.

The Ambassador and embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom with the government and religious leaders and continued outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders. The embassy provided grants to religious groups and local officials to promote tolerance and enhance religious cohesion and dialogue. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for Christian and Muslim leaders and government officials, during which participants discussed religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.4 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2009 census, approximately 58 percent is Muslim, 18 percent Roman Catholic, 16 percent Protestant, and the remainder practices indigenous religious beliefs or has no religious affiliation. Most Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition and a small minority hold beliefs associated with Wahhabism or Salafism. According to the Catholic Church, slightly more than half of Christians are Catholic. The majority of Protestants are evangelical Christians. There are also small numbers of Bahais and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or indigenous religions. Religious distribution is becoming more mixed, especially in urban areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

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Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It declares a secular state and provides for separation of religion and the state. It prohibits “denominational propaganda” that infringes on national unity or the secular nature of the state.

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating intercommunal conflict, reporting on religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom.

The constitution states public education shall be secular. The government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits religious groups to operate private schools.

The constitution states military service is obligatory and prohibits invoking religious belief to “avoid an obligation dictated by the national interest.” Nevertheless, the military is an all-volunteer force.

Under the Code of Organization of Associations, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. Failure to register with the ministry may lead to a ban of a group, one month to a year in prison, and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$93 to \$928). Groups that fail to register are not considered legal entities and cannot open a bank account or enter into contracts. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

According to regulations of the government board that oversees the distribution of oil revenues, Muslim and Christian leaders share a rotational position on the board.

Government Practices

President Idriss Deby Itno encouraged religious tolerance through public statements and urged religious leaders to promote peaceful cohabitation among religious groups. During the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, he urged each religious group to advocate for harmony among all citizens. The president further

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commended what he stated were the amicable relations and understanding prevailing among leaders of the various religious denominations. He encouraged them to strengthen their ties, which he said constituted the bedrock of national unity.

The government continued funding the construction of the country's first Catholic basilica, as well as restoration of the Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral in N'Djamena.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other's ceremonies and celebrations. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of attacks or threats against members of any religious group or groups' property, or of communal tensions between Muslims and Christians.

Leaders from the country's principal religious organizations, including the Secretary of the Chadian Churches and Evangelical Mission for Harmony (EEMET), Souina Potiphar, and the Vice President of the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference of Chad, Bishop Joachim Kouraleyo Tarounga, publicly stated they supported the president's statements advocating religious tolerance.

The independent High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) oversaw Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represented the country at international Islamic forums. In coordination with the president, the HCIA appointed the grand imam, who was confirmed by the president. The grand imam oversaw each region's high imam and served as head of the council. He had the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and control activities of Muslim charities, although he did not exercise it.

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, comprised of representatives of evangelical churches, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, met three times during the year to promote religious tolerance and combat prejudice. On January 25, President Deby Itno presided over the group's third annual National Day of Peace, Peaceful Cohabitation, and National Concord, which consisted of prayer and pardon for people of all faiths and aimed to promote tolerance and eliminate verbal abuse and physical violence. The event also celebrated interfaith

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harmony among the nation's three largest religious groups. Principal leaders of the Muslim, Catholic, and evangelical faith communities delivered speeches extolling what they characterized as the strong ties and peaceful coexistence among citizens of all faiths.

On August 20 in Moundou, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant leaders launched a project funded by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to teach values of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence to refugees and Chadian returnees from the Central African Republic. The Secretary General of EEMET, the President of the HCIA, the vice president of the Episcopal Conference of Chad, and more than 700 individuals gathered in Moundou and pledged to promote peace, unity, and tolerance among the different religious communities. Participants continued the interfaith dialogue through subsequent meetings in Gore, Sarh, Sido, and Moissala.

On January 12, the grand imam hosted a ceremony commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad at N'Djamena's Grand Mosque, during which he stressed what he termed was the country's successful interreligious dialogue and religious coexistence. Numerous imams and religious teachers attended, as well as the prime minister, the head of EEMET, and members of the diplomatic corps.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious tolerance through diplomatic engagement and outreach, including visits, workshops, and cultural programs. The Ambassador and embassy officials met frequently with the grand imam and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom and tolerance with government officials throughout the year.

The embassy awarded two grants to promote interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful cohabitation. One grant provided \$100,000 for a project to engage local opinion leaders, Quranic school teachers in particular, who had the highest access to and influence over marginalized youth in communities susceptible to violent extremism. This project sought to integrate civic values of nonviolence, tolerance, and human rights into Quranic schools through interactive teaching methods. The second grant awarded \$100,000 for a project to build local rapid response structures that facilitated early warning of and rapid response to conflicts,

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including interfaith conflicts, and build local capacity among community secular and religious leaders to gather, analyze, and validate information related to emergent interfaith conflicts.

The embassy also continued to implement ongoing programs, including funding for interfaith conferences in the religiously diverse southern towns of Moundou and Bongor and meetings of religious leaders in Sarh and Lai, as well as support for vocational training at a religious institute that promotes and practices cohabitation among Muslims and Christians in southern Chad.

The Ambassador hosted an iftar attended by Christian and Muslim leaders, as well as government officials. Embassy officials and invitees discussed religious freedom and tolerance in the country.