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

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 490,000 square miles and a population of 15.9 million.

More than 98 percent of the population practices Islam. Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni and 5 percent are Shia. There are also small communities of Christians and Bahais. Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, account for less than 2 percent of the population and are mainly in the regions of Maradi, Dogondoutchi, and Niamey, as well as other urban centers with foreign resident populations. Numbering a few thousand, Bahais reside primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River bordering Burkina Faso. A very small percentage of the population is reported to practice indigenous religious beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

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

The government generally respected this right in practice but monitored religious expression it viewed as potentially threatening to public order or national unity.

Traditional chiefs and senior Muslim clergy asserted in public statements their right to approve sermon content and mosque-building plans by foreign Muslim preachers and donors. Foreign clergy and organizations, whose doctrine often differed from the traditional Sufi teachings of mainline clergy and chiefs, were nonetheless active in the country.

Following the seizure of power by the military in February, the new military junta, the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR), dismantled the Ministry of Religious Affairs and transferred responsibility for overseeing religious affairs to the newly expanded Ministry of the Interior, Security, Decentralization, and Religious Affairs (MOI). The Nigerien Islamic Council (CIN), composed of representatives from Muslim organizations and government agencies, reports to the MOI. The government now regulates Hajj preparations, having cited flawed organization of the Hajj by various local travel agencies in the past.

The constitution strictly forbids political parties from basing a political platform on any religious ideology.

Religious organizations must register with the MOI. There was no evidence that the government favored one religious group over another or that it had ever refused to register a religious organization. Approval is based on submission of required legal documents and the vetting of the organization's leaders. The government must also authorize construction of all places of worship; however, there were no reports that the government refused construction permits during the reporting period.

Foreign missionaries must be officially registered under an approved association.

The minister of the interior, security, decentralization, and religious affairs has the legal authority to ban religious speech in order to ensure public security and social peace.

The government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

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The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Lailat al-Qadr, Eid al-Adha, Muharram, and Christmas. It is common for Muslims and Christians to attend one another's festivities during these holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. On August 22, the MOI rejected a permit request for a march organized by Islamic associations to protest secularism in the draft constitution. Organizers canceled the protest.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country.

During the reporting period, the CIN conducted seminars to harmonize Islamic holy days in order to avoid a repeat of conflicts over the correct date for celebration of Eid al-Fitr such as those that occurred in September 2009, when Zinder regional police used tear gas and batons to disperse the population of Korin Bakoye for celebrating Eid al-Fitr one day later than the government's announced Eid date.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

Christian and Muslim leaders continued to cultivate values shared by persons of both faiths in order to foster a peaceful resolution to the February seizure of power by the military. Immediately after the coup, they met regularly with the ruling CSRD and have since served on the National Consultative Council. In December they organized nationwide prayers for peaceful elections.

On October 19, international and bilateral donors along with Muslim clerics conducted a validation workshop for a guidebook for advocacy, education, and communication skills on "gender and Islam," and for human rights promotion in general.

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On October 20, in his opening remarks during the regular session of the CIN, the minister of interior, security, decentralization, and religious affairs urged religious leaders to continue advocating tolerance and peace in order to promote democratic principles in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy regularly emphasized the importance of religious tolerance in public statements and programs, as well as in meetings with government officials and members of civil society.