

# **CAMEROON 2012 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. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

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

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom issues with government officials. Embassy officers met with prominent figures from all religious groups throughout the country, and hosted receptions and iftars with members of different religious groups in attendance. The embassy organized conferences and debates with members of the Muslim community to discuss religious freedom. The ambassador and an embassy-sponsored U.S. rabbi addressed members of the Cameroon Muslim Students Union (CAMSU), the most influential Muslim youth organization in the country, at its annual conference focusing on religious freedom and tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The government estimates the population to be 19.4 million. The 2005 census, the most recent available, indicates that 69.2 percent of the population is Christian, 20.9 percent Muslim, and 5.6 percent animist. Groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Jews and Bahais. Census data indicates the Christian population is 38.4 percent Roman Catholic, 26.3 percent Protestant, 4 percent other Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, and less than 1 percent Orthodox Christians.

Muslims and Christians live in every region, although Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western regions. Large cities have significant populations of both groups. The two Anglophone regions of the country are largely Protestant, and the eight Francophone regions are mostly Catholic. In the northern regions, the dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mainly Muslim, but the overall population in those regions is fairly evenly divided among Muslims, Christians, and followers of indigenous religions, who are mostly located in rural areas. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Region is predominately Muslim.

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Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of African animist beliefs.

### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

#### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the right of individuals to choose, practice, and change their religion. The constitution also guarantees the right of any citizen to sue the government for the violation of any constitutionally protected freedom.

The law on freedom of association governs relations between the government and religious groups. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) and the presidency must approve and register religious groups in order for them to operate in the country. Although the law prescribes no specific penalties for operating without official recognition, the government reserves the right to ban illegal groups at any time.

To register, a religious group must legally qualify as a religious congregation, defined as “any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship” or “any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine.” The religious group then submits to MINATD a request for authorization, a copy of the group’s charter describing planned activities, and the names and functions of the group’s officials. MINATD reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. The president may then grant authorization by presidential decree. Official recognition confers no general tax benefits but allows religious groups to receive real estate as a tax-free gift for the conduct of their activities, allows missionaries to receive visas with longer validity, and permits public gathering and worship.

The Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education require private schools that religious groups run to meet the same curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher-training standards as state-operated schools.

The law does not restrict religious publishing or other religious media. The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Eid Al Adha, and Christmas.

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### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government was slow to approve the legal status of a number of religious groups, including some from the United States, whose applications have been pending for years in several cases. Although by law groups must register, numerous unregistered small religious groups operated freely and the government did not ban or close any unregistered groups.

The government did not register indigenous religious groups, characterizing the practice of traditional religion as a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

The state-sponsored television station and radio stations regularly broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and religious ceremonies on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers or the president often attended these ceremonies. The Catholic Church operated a private printing press and published a weekly newspaper.

The government provided an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including those religious denominations operated. Religious groups also ran several universities.

### **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.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. embassy regularly discussed religious freedom issues with government officials. Embassy representatives also met with prominent representatives from all principal religious groups to discuss challenges to religious freedom, outreach among religious groups, religious tolerance, and administrative issues. In interactions with the government, embassy officials advocated for greater transparency and efficiency in approving the status of religious groups.

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The embassy hosted conferences, debates, and iftars with members of the Muslim community to discuss religious freedom. The ambassador spoke about religious freedom and tolerance at the CAMSU annual conference. CAMSU is the largest Muslim student association in the country, with more than 10,000 members drawn from universities and secondary schools throughout the country. The embassy also supported the participation of an American rabbi in the same conference. In April the CAMSU president traveled to the United States to participate in an embassy-sponsored program on Religious Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue.