

# **GABON 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. ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government. The embassy engaged regularly with key religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officials also met regularly with the newly revived National Human Rights Commission and often discussed religious freedom during these meetings.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

A 2011 World Bank report estimates the population to be 1.5 million. Approximately 70 percent is Christian. From 10 to 15 percent is Muslim, of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners. Ten percent practices animism exclusively and 5 percent does not identify with any religion. Many persons practice a syncretistic religious belief that combines elements of Christianity, traditional religious beliefs, Voudon (Voodoo), or animism.

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

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. The Interior Ministry maintains an official registry of religious groups. Religious groups are exempt from land use and construction permit fees. Registered religious groups are not automatically tax-exempt and must complete an additional formal registration process to prove that they are nonprofit organizations to be exempt from tax requirements. If

## **GABON**

recognized as a religious organization but not eligible for nonprofit status, a religious group is required to pay local taxes and customs duties on imports.

Muslim, Protestant, and Roman Catholic groups operate primary and secondary schools. These schools must register with the Ministry of Education, which is charged with ensuring that they meet the same standards required for public schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: All Saints' Day, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Christmas, Easter Sunday and Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Kebir (Eid al-Adha), and Pentecost.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

An Interior Ministry official noted progress in granting registration to religious groups during the year, stating that only a few outstanding requests remained unanswered. Groups awaiting registration experienced no restriction on activities.

### **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. ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government. The embassy maintained contact with the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of the Interior, the National Human Rights Commission, and various nongovernmental organizations to discuss the general state of religious freedom in the country.