

GUINEA 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.

General societal practices, such as intermarriage or interfaith schooling, promote religious freedom. There were reports, however, of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During discussions with government officials, U.S. embassy representatives urged the government to respect the rights of all religious groups, especially those of religious minorities. The U.S. embassy also supported interfaith collaboration and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.2 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent is Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the population incorporates some indigenous rituals into its religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Bahai community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, large cities, the south, and the eastern Forest Region. Adherents of indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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The constitution stipulates the state is secular and provides for the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice.

The government's Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic tensions. The secretary general of religious affairs appoints six national directors to lead the offices of Christian affairs, Islamic affairs, pilgrimages, places of worship, economic affairs and the endowment, and general inspector.

The government coordinates with the Interreligious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches, and the SRA.

By law the SRA must approve all religious groups. The group must provide a written constitution and application to the SRA along with the group's address and a fee of GNF250,000 (\$36). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MATD – the equivalent of an interior ministry) for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes an officially recognized religion. Registration entitles religious groups to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and to select energy subsidies. Once registered, each religious group must present to the government a report on its affairs every six months. The process is not considered onerous, and no group has ever been rejected or shut down after receiving SRA and MATD approval.

Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. By law the government can shut down unregistered groups and expel foreign group leaders. There is limited opportunity for legal appeal of these penalties.

Religious groups may not own radio and television stations, but the government permits religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio. The government allocates broadcast time during the week on state-owned national television for Islamic and Christian programming, including Sunday mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

The compulsory primary school curriculum does not include religious studies. Islamic schools are prevalent throughout the country and are the traditional forum for religious education. Some Islamic schools are private, while others receive local government support. Islamic schools, particularly common in the Fouta Djallon region, teach the compulsory government curriculum along with additional

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Quranic studies. Christian schools, which accept students of all religious groups, exist in the nation's capital and most other big cities. Christian schools are private and include prayers before school. They do not receive government support but teach the compulsory curriculum.

There are several madrassahs, usually associated with a mosque. Unlike the Islamic schools, they do not teach the national primary school curriculum, they teach in Arabic rather than French, and focus on Quranic studies. The government does not recognize madrassahs, which are not linked with the public school system and do not fulfill compulsory curriculum requirements. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states support some madrassahs.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry are government employees.

Government Practices

There was no government restriction on conversion from Islam to Christianity, or between any religious groups, but some non-Muslims stated the government continued to favor Muslims over non-Muslims.

The SRA facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims but provided no similar service to other religious communities.

The government approved all religious group registration applications. According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely but did not receive the tax and other benefits received by registered groups. The small Bahai community practiced openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

The SRA, whose duties include receiving and acting on complaints about obstruction of religious freedom, stated it received only one complaint concerning two Christian pastors involved in a dispute over a church. The SRA attributed the low number of complaints to a lack of public awareness of the complaint process. It stated the complaint level should be higher given some community- and family-level disregard for national laws on religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

While intermarriage is common and most religions are tolerated, in some parts of the country, strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam.

The SRA stated conversion from Islam sometimes resulted in rejection or persecution by families and communities. On October 24, the SRA confirmed that a woman in the Fouta Djallon region was not allowed to provide Christian funeral services for her Muslim husband. The Christian widow was reportedly later exiled by her husband's family. The SRA stated this type of religious discrimination disproportionately affected women. Intermarriage between people of different religious groups was common, however. Women of all religious groups were also disproportionately affected by the practices of forced marriage, including child marriage. Religious officials, primarily imams, presided over some of these illegal marriages.

The town of Dinguiraye, a city African Muslims consider holy, reportedly did not permit public celebrations of non-Muslim religious holidays or festivals. A priest who was refused permission by local officials to build a church in Dinguiraye in 2012 did not pursue the matter again in 2013.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy personnel worked closely with religious leaders, including the Grand Imams of Conakry and Labe, the Catholic Archbishop of Guinea, and Islamic and Christian clergy, to advocate for peace, reconciliation, and tolerance, as well as to encourage all parties to commit to nonviolent, constitutional politics.

The embassy hosted several iftar dinners across the country during Ramadan with people from all walks of life, ranging from Boke's handicapped citizens, to Conakry's and Labe's poor residents, to the nation's first lady, and the prime minister. Embassy and other participants emphasized messages of religious freedom and toleration at the iftars. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also met with religious leaders during regular visits to cities and villages outside of the nation's capital.