

# **GHANA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice their religion.

A community in Apatrapa village blocked the construction of a mosque at an adjacent university, saying the mosque would be a public nuisance.

The U.S. embassy engaged with religious leaders, government officials, and community organizations to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and sponsored several events and programs to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 25.8 million (July 2014 estimate). Approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent identifies as belonging to other religious groups or having no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Eden Revival Church International, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quaker), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Islamic traditions include Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and a small number of Shia.

Many individuals who self-identify as Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs. There are also syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

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There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of Muslims reside in northern areas and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs reside in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice any religion and manifest such practice.

Religious groups must register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for other nongovernmental organizations. In order to register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee. Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

According to the law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities.

The education ministry includes compulsory religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. These courses incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity. There is also an Islamic education unit within the ministry responsible for coordinating all public education activities for Islamic communities.

#### **Government Practices**

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice was responsible for monitoring, inspecting, and reporting on the conditions of prayer camps throughout the country, especially in areas where there were reports of abusive treatment of camp residents. Spiritual healers operated the camps, which some communities used as treatment facilities for individuals with physical and mental illnesses, and for others considered societal outcasts such as those accused of witchcraft. The

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Mental Health Authority continued a pilot program that placed psychiatric nurses in prayer camps to give medication to patients while they prayed.

Government meetings, receptions, and state funerals used both Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. The president and vice president made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. For example, in August at an Eid al-Fitr celebration in Kumasi, President Mahama commended Muslims and other religious leaders for promoting peaceful coexistence among the various faiths and said the unity of Ghana's religious leaders had contributed to an atmosphere of peace in the country.

Unlike previous years, there were no reports teachers in public secondary schools in the Western, Eastern, and Central Regions discriminated against Muslim students by requiring them to attend Christian church services and participate in Christian prayers as part of their education. The Islamic Education Unit was responsible for disciplining school authorities who engaged in such discriminatory practices.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Community leaders blocked the construction of a mosque on the Kumasi campus of the University of Education-Winneba, a public university that borders the village of Apatrapa. The university gave the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA) land to build the mosque; however, leaders from the surrounding community of Apatrapa complained the mosque would be a nuisance and disturb the community. The community leaders perpetual injunction to restrain the construction of the mosque. By year's end, the university had not filed a defense to the affidavit, stating it was first requiring the GMSA to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the university that would determine how the mosque would be used. For example, the MOU would prohibit the use of a public address system for daily prayers. The GMSA refused to sign the MOU because it said it would infringe on the group's freedom to worship. At year's end, the dispute was ongoing and the government had not become involved.

There were no reports of interreligious violence; however, nearly 200 Ghanaians requested asylum in Brazil after entering the country on tourist visas to watch the World Cup in June 2014. The asylum seekers said they were Muslims who were fleeing violent interreligious conflict. Ghanaian authorities denied the claims and asserted there was no religious conflict underway in the country. Brazilian

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authorities granted the asylum seekers a one-year permit to live and work in the country.

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

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors, including Islamic civil society organizations and Christian groups. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups.

The embassy supported a U.S. government program that provided merit-based scholarships for students from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend an academic year attending a U.S. high school while living with a host family. Of the 10 students from Ghana who participated in this program, more than half were Muslim. The students learned about Muslim culture in the United States and how U.S. Muslims lived harmoniously among other faiths.

In August an embassy representative spoke on the importance of religious tolerance at the second annual Zongo Chiefs of the Northern Region Conference in Tamale. The conference centered on the role of the Zongo people in fostering peace and coexistence in the northern regions.

In July the embassy organized a session for a local audience to interact via internet with a Muslim city councilman in Massachusetts, who spoke about life as a Muslim in the United States and the role of U.S. Muslims to participate freely in the formulation of U.S. domestic and international policies. The 40-member audience included students, civil society activists, and members of various Islamic religious and community organizations.

In July the Ambassador met with the national chief imam and others from his office in honor of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. The Ambassador and the national chief imam noted the important role interfaith dialogues played in promoting peaceful coexistence among religions and highlighted the need to speak out against extremism.

In July the Ambassador hosted an iftar that included religious leaders from various faiths. The event highlighted religious tolerance as well as universal values shared by all faiths such as peace, justice, charity, family, and community.

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In June the Ambassador visited the central mosque in the northern city of Tamale and noted public statements by the regional chief imam and the head of the Ambariya Sunni community denouncing the actions of Boko Haram and calling on Muslims in Ghana to disassociate Islam from the activities of the that group.