

Status of Human Rights in Guinea for the 49th Session of the Universal Periodic Review

Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Guinea (Guinea) for the 49th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Guinea is a country located in western Africa and has a population of approximately 13.9 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Muslim, with approximately 89.1% of the population identifying as Muslim, 6.8% as Christian, 1.6% as animist, and 2.5% belonging to no religion.² In its 2024 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Guinea as the 69th worst country for Christians.³

3. Guinea's last review was held on January 21, 2020.⁴ As a result of the review, Guinea received 213 recommendations, 203 of which it supported.⁵ Even though Christians have been harassed, attacked, and ostracized because of their Christian faith in Guinea, there were no recommendations made regarding religious freedom.⁶

Legal Framework

4. Currently, Guinea has no constitution.⁷ This was the result of a coup in September 2021 that subsequently suspended the Constitution of Guinea.⁸ However, Guinea is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and has a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined within.⁹ Article 18 of the ICCPR states that:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship,

¹ Thomas E. O'Toole, *Guinea*, BRITANNICA (June 23, 2024), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guinea>.

² *Id.*

³ OPEN DOORS, GUINEA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 4 (2024),

⁴ *Universal Periodic Review – Guinea*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/gn-index> (last visited July 9, 2024).

⁵ *Infographic – Guinea*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session35/GN/Guinea_Infographic_35.pdf (last visited July 9, 2024).

⁶ *Id.* 6.

⁷ *Guinea*, FREEDOM HOUSE (2024), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/guinea/freedom-world/2024>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Ratification Status for Guinea*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=134&Lang=EN.

observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹⁰

5. Further, under Article 27 of the ICCPR:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.¹¹

6. Protections for religious liberty are likewise enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Religious Persecution

7. In Guinea, Christians face persecution at the societal level, mainly from friends, family, and others in the community.¹² Additionally, Christian converts are threatened and harassed if they do not renounce their faith.¹³ In more rural regions of the country, where African traditional religions are practiced, Christians are ostracized from their community for not participating in religious festivals and are viewed as outsiders.¹⁴ One Christian pastor shared how he was working to find homes for thirteen church members who were kicked out of their homes because they were Christians.¹⁵ Further, churches have been attacked and destroyed as a result of political instability and unrest.¹⁶

8. While Christians are generally not arrested for practicing their faith, they have been abused, harassed, coerced into marriages, and forced to leave their community for safety.¹⁷ Christian converts are at risk of being abducted, cut off from their family, and forcibly married to Muslims.¹⁸ For example, one Christian woman was abused, threatened, and legally disowned by her family, because she converted to Christianity.¹⁹ She also shared that it was hard for her to find housing because many people will not rent to Christians.²⁰

9. In another example, a Christian man was forced by his family to marry a Muslim woman in hopes that he would convert.²¹ Soon after the couple had their first child, the

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹¹ *Id.* art. 27.

¹² OPEN DOORS, GUINEA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 6 (2024), <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2024-Guinea-Full-Country-Dossier.pdf>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ “*They Let People Kill Each Other*”, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Sep. 25, 2020), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/25/they-let-people-kill-each-other/violence-nzerekore-during-guineas-constitutional>.

¹⁷ OPEN DOORS, GUINEA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 27 (2024), *supra* note 12.

¹⁸ *Id.* 29.

¹⁹ *New Believers Rejected by Their Families*, I COMMIT TO PRAY (May 28, 2020), <https://www.icommittoprayer.com/request/2035/mariam-and-other-new-christians/>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Guinea: Christian Man Attacked by Muslim Wife*, VOICE OF THE MARTYRS AUSTRALIA (July 27, 2022), <https://cmhns.org/guinea-christian-man-attacked-by-muslim-wife/>.

convert's family attempted to force him to perform an Islamic ceremony for his child, and when he refused, his wife stabbed him with a knife.²² The Christian man was sent to the hospital to be treated for his injury, and when he returned home, his family would not let him see his child.²³

10. Further, the ousting of President Condé in the September 2021 coup resulted in restrictions on the citizens' freedom of religion.²⁴ Under military rule, authorities have implemented bureaucratic barriers for churches to become and stay registered.²⁵ One way authorities have done this is by requiring churches to submit activity reports every six months.²⁶ Additionally, local authorities are often reluctant to work with Christians to register churches and impede the construction of new churches.²⁷

11. Christians were also subject to violence stemming from elections in March 2020.²⁸ These violent clashes resulted in dozens of homes and churches destroyed or damaged.²⁹ For example, on March 22, 2020, one of the largest Christian churches in Guinea was burned down.³⁰ This was the second time the church had been targeted and destroyed.³¹ One Christian pastor shared his experience of his church being attacked.

On March 22, at around 4 p.m., as a group of armed ethnic Konianké and Malinké approached, I immediately called a local military officer and a political leader who told me to keep calm, promising to send security forces to protect the church. But nothing. My church was destroyed. The roof collapsed and the walls were badly damaged. It is not until the following day that security forces came just to assess the damages.³²

12. Another Christian pastor's home, church, and school were attacked by a mob after authorities did not respond to his call for help.³³ He stated:

In the early morning, armed individuals, mainly Malinké and Konianké, invaded my area. I called a local political authority to ask him to send security forces to protect us. He promised to send the military. But none ever came. In the meantime, confrontations erupted between armed Konianké and Malinké, and armed Guerzé and there was shooting. I was home with my family. Then, the invaders attacked my home, church and school. They fired at the church, broke the door, and looted all the 217 chairs and other valuable items. Then, they attacked the school and destroyed the window of my car. Finally, they shot at my home. I managed to escape from the back with my family. The attack lasted from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. There was no sign of any security forces

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ OPEN DOORS, GUINEA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 9 (2022), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/Guinea-Full-Country-Dossier-February-2022.pdf>.

²⁵ OPEN DOORS, GUINEA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 19 (2024), *supra* note 3.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* 6.

²⁸ "They Let People Kill Each Other", *supra* note 16.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ C&MA Church in Guinea is Burned – Persecution Grows in West African Countries, ALLIANCE WORLD FELLOWSHIP (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://awf.world/awf-news/cma-church-in-guinea-is-burned-persecution-grows-in-west-african-countries/>.

³¹ "They Let People Kill Each Other," *supra* note 16.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

around. I called them many times, and none responded.³⁴

13. In another attack that occurred during this period of unrest, one Christian woman shared how her father was killed trying to stop an angry mob from destroying his church:

One day, we were at home, some people came over attacking the church to set it on fire [. . .] My father, who is one of the church leaders, had done everything he could to defend the church. The people refused to listen to what my father had to say, and they burnt down the church and the house. They destroyed my father's life and killed him.³⁵

She and her family were then forced to flee after they became afraid that they would also be targeted.

14. Additionally, while the constitution has been suspended because of the coup, a new constitution is being drafted.³⁶ The constitution that was suspended had enshrined protections for religious liberty. Under Article 7 of the now suspended Constitution of Guinea, "[e]ach one is free to believe, to think and to profess their religious faith."³⁷ It is essential that the new constitution not only enshrine protections for religious liberty that are in line with the rights enshrined in the ICCPR and the UDHR, but that the government actually implements the protections.

Recommendations

15. Guinea is currently ruled by a transitional government, but it still must provide protections for religious freedom. Christians must be permitted to freely and openly practice their faith without fear of attacks or harassment by the Muslim majority. Even though Guinea's constitution has been suspended, the government is still responsible for upholding the rights enshrined in both the ICCPR and UDHR. Further, as Guinea works on drafting a new constitution, we urge Guinea to ensure that protections for religious freedom and worship are enshrined in the new constitution.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *GUINEA: Student.*

³⁶ *Guinea's New Draft Constitution Will Reduce and Limit Presidential Term*, U.S. NEWS (July 30, 2024), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2024-07-30/guineas-new-draft-constitution-will-reduce-and-limit-presidential-term>.

³⁷ CONSTITUTION OF GUINEA 2010 art. 7, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guinea_2010.