

**U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Guinea**

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GUINEA

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Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits religious communities to govern themselves without state interference; and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

A government-sponsored organization, the National Islamic League (NIL), represents the country's Sunni Muslim majority, which comprises some 85 percent of the population. The Government requires that all recognized Christian churches join the Association of Churches and Missions in order to benefit from certain government privileges, such as tax benefits and energy subsidies. Missionary groups are required to make a declaration of their aims and activities to the Ministry of Interior or to the National Islamic League.

Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, some 85 percent of the population profess Islam, while 10 percent follow various Christian faiths, and 5 percent hold traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims in the country generally adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam; adherents of the Shi'a branch remain relatively few, although they are increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventist, and various other Christian evangelical churches active in the country and recognized by the Government. The small Baha'i community practices its faith openly and freely, although it is not officially recognized. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religions among the expatriate community. Few, if any, citizens profess atheism.

Geographically, Muslims are a majority in all four major regions. Christians are most numerous in the capital, in lower Guinea, and in the forest region. Christians are found in all large towns throughout the country, with the exception of the Fouta Jallon region of middle Guinea, where the Puhlar (or Fulani or Peuhl) ethnic group fiercely opposes the establishment of religious communities other than Islamic ones. Traditional indigenous religions are most prevalent in the forest region.

No data is available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals, but the National Islamic League estimates that 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

Although there are no known organized heterogeneous or syncretistic religious communities, both Islam and Christianity have developed syncretistic tendencies, which reflect the continuing influence and acceptability of traditional indigenous beliefs and rituals.

The country's large immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same faiths as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of traditional indigenous religions.

The National Islamic League's stated policy is to promote better relations with other religious denominations and dialog aimed at ameliorating interethnic and interreligious tensions. Although the Government and the NIL have spoken out against the proliferation of Shi'a fundamentalist groups, on the grounds that they "generate confusion and deviation" within the country's Islamic family, they have not restricted the religious activities of these groups.

Government support of the powerful, semi-official National Islamic League has led some non-Muslims to complain that the Government uses its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims, although non-Muslims are represented in the Cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and the armed forces. Conversions of senior officials to Islam, such as that of the Defense Minister, are ascribed to the NIL's efforts to influence the religious beliefs of senior government leaders. The Government refrains from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the particularly strong social dominance of Islam in these regions.

In April 1999, for the first time, the Government required government ministers to take an oath on either the Koran or the Bible, which provoked criticism from those who saw the gesture as incompatible with the secular nature of the State.

The Government utilizes all religious groups in its civic education efforts and national prayers for peace. The Government does not have a specific program to promote interfaith understanding.

Both Muslim and Christian holidays are recognized by the Government and celebrated by the population.

The government-controlled official press reports on religious events involving both Islamic and Christian groups.

With rare exceptions, foreign missionary groups and church-affiliated relief agencies operate freely in the country. These include Roman Catholic, Philafricaine, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many American missionary societies. There have been isolated reports that government officials have obstructed or limited missionary activities by Jehovah's Witnesses.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the various religions are generally amicable.

In some parts of the country, Islam's dominance is such that there is strong social pressure that discourages non-Muslims from practicing their religion openly.

There are no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different faiths.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities, monitors developments affecting religious freedom, and discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

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