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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Guinea

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
July 30, 2012

[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During discussions with government officials, the U.S. government urged the government to respect the rights of all religious groups, especially those of religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent is Christian, and 5 percent holds indigenous religious beliefs, although much of the population incorporates some indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni, although the few Shia are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Baha'i community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

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

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high as a result of the close ties between cultural rituals and religious practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice. Protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes. In general, traditional resolution is preferred to the courts.

The Secretariat of Religious Affairs 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 Secretariat of Religious Affairs.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat of Religious Affairs. During the year, the government registered all groups that submitted applications. The small Baha'i community practiced its religious beliefs openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

The government prohibits ownership of private radio and television stations by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned commercial radio. The government allocates broadcast time during the week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national television, including Sunday mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

Islamic schools are prevalent throughout the country and are considered the traditional forum for religious education. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region.

There are several madrassahs (schools), which differ from Islamic schools, across the country. These schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf States. The madrassahs are not formally linked with the public school system and are not recognized by the government because they teach only Arabic and Islam. At year's end, the Ministry of Education continued its efforts to integrate the madrassahs into the government financed "Franco-Arab" system, which offers religious instruction in addition to a curriculum comparable to the public schools.

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

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

While unregistered religious groups were subject to expulsion, in practice, there were no expulsions during the year and these groups continued to operate.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. For example, universities close on Friday so Muslim students can go to mosque but schedule classes on Sunday, preventing Christian students from attending church. Additionally, the Secretariat of Religious Affairs facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims but did not provide any similar service to the Christian community.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and select energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and

other benefits and are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal.

The government is currently attempting to use the relatively peaceful religious situation in the country to lessen ethnic tensions. In August the government asked the First Imam, the most senior Islamic leader in the country, and the Catholic Archbishop of Conakry, the leader of the largest Christian denomination, to jointly lead a provisional national reconciliation commission that would seek ethnic reconciliation and justice for human rights violations committed under more than fifty years of dictatorship.

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; however, in some parts of the country, strong cultural, social, and economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. The missionary community reported that while conversion from Islam to Christianity was allowed by the government, it sometimes resulted in rejection or persecution by families and communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government continued to engage the government and civil society on religious freedom and tolerance issues, especially of religious minorities, as part of its ongoing engagement to promote religious freedom. The strongest components of this engagement were public diplomacy efforts that included an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) with government officials and local religious leaders.
