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USDOS – US Department of State

2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Guinea

Executive Summary

The constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religion. The High Authority of Communication banned three private radio stations from activity, stating it considered these stations as having a “denominational” character. The Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) continued to issue weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. Although the SRA did not control sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. In July the government called for a temporary moratorium on public protests against increased fuel prices in what it said was an effort to ensure that pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia would be able to complete administrative tasks ahead of their trip. The Governor of Conakry called for all protests to cease while pilgrims prepared to travel to Saudi Arabia and Christian destinations.

Members of religious minority groups continued to report discrimination, and Islamic intrafaith rivalries between the majority Tidjani and the minority Wahhabi communities continued to exist.

On multiple occasions, the Ambassador and other embassy officials met with the secretary of religious affairs and the Grand Imam of Conakry to discuss religious tolerance, reconciliation, and social cohesion among religious groups. A senior embassy officer hosted an iftar with senior Muslim leaders from throughout the country, conveying the importance of religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.9 million (July 2018 estimate). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the Muslim and Christian population incorporates indigenous rituals into their religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni; Sufism is also present. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and

several evangelical groups. There is also a small Baha'i community, and small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four regions of the country. Christians are concentrated in large cities, including Conakry, 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 FRAMEWORK

The constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religious faith. It recognizes the right of religious institutions and groups to establish and manage themselves freely. It bars political parties that identify with a particular religious group. These rights are subject only to “those limits that are indispensable to maintain the public order and democracy.”

By law, the SRA must approve all religious groups. Groups must provide a written constitution and application to the SRA along with their address and a fee of 250,000 Guinean francs (\$28). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes officially recognized. Every six months, each registered religious group must present a report of its activities to the government. Registering with the government entitles religious groups to an exemption from the value-added tax (VAT) on incoming shipments and makes them eligible for select energy subsidies.

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

Religious groups may not own radio or television stations.

The compulsory primary school curriculum does not include religious studies. Many parents send their children to Quranic schools either in addition to primary school or as their primary form of education.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry and the principal mosques in the main cities of the four regions are government employees. These mosques are directly under the administration of the government. Other mosques and some Christian groups receive government subsidies for pilgrimages.

The SRA 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 Inspector General. The SRA is charged with promoting

good relations among religious groups and coordinates with other members of the informal Interreligious Council, which is composed of Muslims and members from Catholic, Anglican and other Protestant churches, as well as the SRA.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

The SRA continued to issue mandatory weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. The stated purpose of the weekly guidance was to harmonize religious views in order to prevent radical or political messages in sermons. Although the SRA did not monitor sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. Clerics whom the SRA judged to be noncompliant were subject to disciplinary action. Deviations from approved guidance were often reported in various sermons at mosques and other Islamic events, but the SRA said it had difficulty imposing disciplinary sanctions. To address the issue, in January the SRA convened the leading imams in Conakry and Islamic organizations to call for increased sensitivity regarding the messages coming from religious institutions.

In partnership with the UN Population Fund, the government launched a project to prevent radicalization and extreme violence in the country's at-risk areas, with a focus on Quranic schools and Franco-Arabic schools. The project began in September and included training for teachers and religious workers. The training focused on sensitizing populations to the signs and dangers of radicalization and violent extremism, and to religious tolerance and community development.

Saudi Arabian's quota of Hajj pilgrims from the country remained at 9,000 for the year. The SRA organized the logistics and facilitated the travel of 7,500 pilgrims and fixed the year's individual pilgrimage fare at 40.9 million Guinean francs (\$4,500).

The government continued to subsidize the travel of Christians to pilgrimages in the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy.

According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely. The small Jehovah's Witnesses community reportedly proselytized from house to house without interference, although neither it nor the Baha'i community requested official recognition. Some groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relationship with the SRA.

Islamic schools were prevalent throughout the country and remained the traditional forum for religious education. Some Islamic schools were wholly private, while others received local government support. Islamic schools, particularly common in the Fouta Djallon region, taught the compulsory government curriculum along with additional Quranic studies. Private Christian schools, which accepted students of all religious groups, existed in Conakry and most other large cities. They taught the compulsory curriculum but did not receive government support, and they held Christian prayers before school.

In May the Higher Authority of Communication, the regulatory body for the communications sector, banned three private radio stations from operating. The media regulators stated they considered these stations to have a “denominational” character.

In August the government called for a temporary moratorium on public protests against an increase in fuel prices in what it said was an attempt to ensure that Muslim and Christian pilgrims would be able to complete administrative tasks in the capital ahead of their overseas trips. The government stated roadblocks erected by protesters during repeated demonstrations impeded movement around the city and restricted access to the airport and government services. The Governor of Conakry called for all protests to cease while pilgrims prepared to travel.

The government allocated free broadcast time on state-owned national television for Islamic and Christian programming, including Islamic religious instruction, Friday prayers from the central mosque, and church services. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio and encouraged equal time for Christian and Muslim groups.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In some parts of the country such as the middle and the upper regions, particularly strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam.

Members of the Baha’i Faith again reported being discriminated against and shunned by their families because of their religious beliefs.

Islamic intrafaith rivalries between the majority Tidjani and the minority Wahhabi communities continued to exist.

The Kalima Catholic Mission still had not begun construction of a church despite authorization by the government in 2015. The Muslim community reportedly continued to lobby against the project. Religious authorities of both sides continued to work on resolving this issue.

Many Muslim students not enrolled in private Islamic schools received religious education at madrassahs, some of which were associated with mosques and others supported by local communities. Unlike the Islamic schools, the madrassahs did not teach the compulsory primary school curriculum. Although the government did not recognize the madrassahs or require them to register, it allowed them to operate freely. They focused on Quranic studies, and instruction was in Arabic rather than French. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states supported some madrassahs. Most students in madrassahs also attended public or private schools teaching the compulsory curriculum.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with the secretary of religious affairs and the Grand Imam of Conakry to discuss religious tolerance. Embassy officials also met with the assistant to the secretary of religious affairs on multiple occasions, emphasizing religious tolerance and reconciliation among religious groups. A senior embassy official hosted an iftar with senior Muslim leaders from throughout the country, conveying the importance of religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Embassy officials consulted closely with religious leaders, including the Grand Imams of Conakry, Kankan, and Labe; Catholic and Anglican bishops; and other Muslim and Christian clergy. Embassy officers advocated for religious tolerance. Embassy officials also participated in several iftar celebrations nationwide to promote good relations and mutual understanding among religious groups and to relay a message of respect for religious freedom and national reconciliation, including religious acceptance, among groups.

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Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2018)



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