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GUINEA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religion. The Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) controlled religious messaging by issuing 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. There were unconfirmed reports that some imams supporting the opposition had been replaced.

On October 2, a young Muslim man was killed by his family after he converted to Christianity. There were two separate reports of religious groups' attempting to impede construction of other religious groups' buildings. One Muslim group tried to stop another Muslim group from building a new mosque, resulting in five deaths during violent clashes in November. In another case, a Muslim community refused to allow the Kalima Catholic Mission to build a church despite government authorization to do so.

The embassy hosted several iftars with Muslim and other religious leaders throughout the country, conveying each time the importance of religious freedom and harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.7 million (July 2015 estimate). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent is Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the population incorporates some indigenous rituals into its religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni; however, Sufism is present. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Bahai community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, large cities, the south, and the eastern Forest

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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 stipulates 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 (GNF) (\$31). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes an officially recognized religion. Each registered religious group must present to the government a report on its affairs every six months. Registration entitles religious groups to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and to select energy subsidies.

Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. By law, the government can shut down unregistered groups and expel foreign group 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.

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

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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.

Government Practices

The SRA controlled religious messaging by issuing 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. Clerics whom the SRA judged to be noncompliant were subject to disciplinary action. In the district of Matoto in Conakry, an imam critical of the government received a warning from the SRA for a speech that it judged too political. Opposition politicians said there was anecdotal information that some imams who supported it were replaced by the government.

The SRA was again unable to facilitate a pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslim community as Saudi Arabia did not permit Ebola-affected countries to send pilgrims, and 10,000 applicants were unable to travel. The government continued to subsidize the travel of 110 Catholics on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy. The total subsidy amount remained the same as in 2014, three billion Guinean Francs (\$375,000).

According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely but did not receive the tax and other benefits received by registered groups. The small Jehovah's Witness community reportedly proselytized from house to house without interference, although neither it nor the Bahai community requested official recognition. Some groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relation with the SRA.

Islamic schools were prevalent throughout the country and were 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 the nation's capital and most other large cities.

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They taught the compulsory curriculum but did not receive government support and held Christian prayers before school.

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. Muslim broadcasts received more air time, while different Christian groups received broadcast time on Sundays on a rotating basis. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In some parts of the country such as the Middle and the Upper Regions, strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. On October 2, media reported that a young Muslim man was killed by his family in Kouroussa, Upper Guinea, after he converted to Christianity.

There were reports of disputes among Muslim communities. On November 15, two days after an Islamic gathering in Touba, clashes that resulted in five deaths occurred between two Muslim religious groups. Previously, the leading family of one of the groups, the Karambaya religious community, had been opposed to the building of a second mosque initiated by the second group, the Touraya religious community. The government halted the project until a solution agreeable to both sides could be reached. According to the former secretary general of religious affairs, the Karambaya community opposed the new mosque out of fear it would cause economic tensions and division within the broader community. The Karambaya community did not want to lose the economic benefit and social privileges from the various religious ceremonies held in the locality. After the clashes, the president immediately dismissed the secretary general and vice secretary of religious affairs and the then minister of interior.

Reportedly the Muslim community lobbied against and stopped the Kalima Catholic Mission from building a church despite authorization already provided by the government. Religious authorities of both sides were working to resolve this issue. The chief of the mission reported that local authorities of the region were influenced by Muslims to stop issuing necessary permits in this case.

Many Muslim students not enrolled in Islamic schools received religious education at madrassahs, some of which were associated with mosques and others supported

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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, 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, which did not include religious studies.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy personnel worked closely with the SRA and religious leaders, including the Grand Imams of Conakry, Kankan, and Labe; Catholic and Anglican bishops; and Islamic and Christian clergy. Embassy officers advocated for tolerance.

U.S. embassy personnel also participated in several iftar celebrations nationwide to promote good relations and mutual understanding among religious groups as an opportunity to discuss respect for religious freedom. The Ambassador met with the Grand Imam of Conakry in honor of the Eid-al-Adha holiday and discussed religious tolerance.