

Document #1436796

USDOS – US Department of State

2017 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 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.

A land dispute between Christian and Muslim communities in Upper Guinea resulted in conviction of eight individuals for inciting riots and for the arson of a church.

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grands imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance and reconciliation among religious groups. The embassy hosted several iftars with Muslim and other religious leaders throughout the country, conveying each time the importance of religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 12.4 million (July 2017 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 also 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 regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, large cities, 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 (GNF) (\$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 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 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 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 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 connotations 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. Discrepancies were often reported in the various sermons at mosques and other Islamic events, but the SRA had difficulty imposing disciplinary sanctions. The new secretary general met the imams of the capital, as well as leaders of communal and regional leagues, aiming to warn imams for any breach of the principles of Islam; he said imams who speak about politics, attack the president, or preach division between citizens would be subject to sanctions.

Saudi Arabia increased the country's quota of pilgrims to 9,000 from 6,000 in 2016 and limited the age of travelers to Mecca to under 70. The SRA facilitated and organized the travel of 7,000 pilgrims who each paid approximately 40 million GNF (\$4,400) toward the cost of travel.

The government subsidized the travel of Christians on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy, providing 3.5 billion GNF (\$389,000) compared to 2 billion GNF (\$222,000) in 2016. The government decided in 2016 to rotate the benefits to different Christian groups in each subsequent year with Anglicans, Catholics, and Adventists receiving support for their 2017 pilgrimages.

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 Witnesses 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 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 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 programs received more

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

The General Secretariat of Religious Affairs, through the National Directorate of Christian Affairs, initiated for the first time a conference of Christian religious leaders. The conference aimed to bring Christians of different denominations together to improve working relations and share information related to the work of churches and missions in the country. Another goal was to get the different Christian denominations to agree on a common program of awareness and prayer within the framework of the strengthening of national unity, which continued to be an important theme in the country.

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 Bahai Faith again reported being discriminated against and shunned by their families because of their religious beliefs.

In March in Dabadou, Upper Guinea, a land conflict between Muslims and Christians about the ownership of a parcel of land adjacent to the local Catholic church resulted in physical altercations between the communities, injuring 11, and the burning of the church. Security forces arrested 18 individuals, including three women, in connection with the damage. In April the court charged eight of those arrested with “destruction of public buildings, intentional assault, and obstruction of the free exercise of religion.” Most of the sentences were six months suspended with the payment of a fine of 500,000 GNF (\$56).

In the city of Labe in Middle Guinea, Islamic intrafaith rivalries between the majority Tidjani and the minority Wahhabi communities continued to exist, but according to French-language media, local religious and administrative authorities largely resolved these local conflicts by peaceful means.

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, which did not include religious studies.

In February The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints opened a new branch in Conakry.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grands imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance. In addition, he organized an iftar that brought together religious leaders and senior politicians from the ruling coalition and the opposition to underscore religious tolerance.

Embassy officials consulted 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 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.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2017)



Country:

Guinea

Source:

[USDOS – US Department of State \(/en/source/11558.html\)](#)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2017/af/280748.htm> (<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2017/af/280748.htm>)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

29 May 2018

Document ID:

1436796 (former ID [361635 \(/en/document/361635\)\)](/en/document/361635)

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

