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2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom:**Togo**

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

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

Both government policy and the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contribute to the free practice of religion.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion**Legal/Policy Framework**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

The Government establishes requirements for recognition of religious organizations outside the three main faiths--Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Applications must be submitted to the Interior Ministry's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. There are no special requirements for foreign missionary groups. The Interior Ministry issues official recognition. The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization.

Official recognition of religious organizations has created a dilemma for the Government over the years. In the 1970's, the Government clamped down on cults and dubious religious associations, citing national security concerns. Many of the dozens of organizations that presented their credentials were run by persons from other West African countries, principally Nigeria, who were in the country without a valid residence permit. Official recognition was extended only to the Catholic Church, Muslims, and most Protestant churches, including the Assemblies of

God, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Baptists.

In the early 1990's, the concepts of democracy and liberty encouraged a proliferation of religious groups, which began to seek recognition. Cases of individuals who used religion as a cover for other activities also increased. At the same time, advocates for religious freedom demanded more tolerance and protection for people of all faiths. At the urging of the Togolese Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (ATDLR), which was founded in 1991, the Government adopted a more liberal approach; however, the Government concluded that the rise of cults and dubious religious associations was again a problem. In 1995, the last year for which statistics are available, the Government recognized only 71 of the 198 groups that applied for official recognition during that year. It is believed that the others continued to operate in clandestine fashion. These unregistered groups are mostly little known groups within the major religions.

In 1997 the ATDLR submitted to the National Assembly a proposed law designed to address the full range of issues pertaining to religious freedom, including recognition, operating regulations, and penalties for those who restricted the rights of others to worship freely. The National Assembly has not yet taken action on the proposed ATDLR law, nor is it likely to do so, in view of the basic constitutional provision for freedom of religion. Scores of applications for recognition await adjudication at the Ministry of Interior while authorities investigate the bona fides of each organization. In the meantime, these groups practice their faith.

Religious Demography

According to statistics published by the Ministry of Tourism, the population is approximately 22 percent Catholic, 12 percent Sunni Muslim, and 7 percent Protestant. The remaining 59 percent of the population consist of followers of other faiths, including traditional indigenous religions. Many converts to the larger faiths continue to practice some rituals of traditional indigenous religions. Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common.

Missionary groups represent Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

In January 2000, as in past years, President Eyadema, a Protestant, invited Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders to an ecumenical prayer service to commemorate the anniversary of his military takeover. For the second year in a row, the Catholic Church declined the invitation to attend the "Day of National Liberation" service, stating that it is inappropriate to hold a worship service in a government building. In addition, under the leadership of the Archbishop of Lome, the Catholic Church continues to refrain from delivering political sermons praising President Eyadema. The Archbishop's predecessor had used the pulpit to praise the President, but such sermons alienated the congregation, which called for the Archbishop's dismissal.

The 17-member National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) elected by the National Assembly includes Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant representatives. The CNDH hears appeals by religious organizations that the Government has disallowed principally for disturbing the peace.

Governmental Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion and states explicitly that "no political party should identify itself with a region, an ethnic group, or a religion." Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in local and the central government.

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.

Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens 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 refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the various religious communities are amicable. The Christian Council was founded in 1978 to address common issues among Protestant denominations. The Council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-Day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The Council continues to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. A program for Islamic-Christian relations attempts to foster understanding between the two religions. Catholics and Protestants collaborate frequently through the Biblical Alliance. Members of different faiths regularly invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter-marriage across religious lines is common.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. In addition, the Embassy facilitated a meeting between the head of the ATDLR and the U.S. State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom in the fall of 1999. This meeting focused on the efforts of the ATDLR to establish a headquarters in Lome and to further their efforts to promote religious freedom in the West Africa region.

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