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2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Guinea

[Covers the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009]

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Constitution was suspended by the military junta that took power during the December 2008 coup d'état and was not reinstated during the reporting period.

The Government, represented by the military junta effective December 23, 2008, generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Religious leaders continued to play critical roles in the national grassroots movement for constructive political change.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles and a population of 10 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent is Christian, and 5 percent holds indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims are generally Sunni; there are relatively few Shi'a, although they are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and a few evangelical groups. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among the expatriate community.

Some Muslims and Christians incorporate indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices.

Muslims comprise a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the south, and in the eastern Forest Region. Christians also reside in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon region in the middle of the country, where Islam is deeply intertwined with Pular (or Fulani or Peuhl) culture and society. Indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high since traditional cultural rituals are often closely tied to religious practices.

The country's significant immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same religious beliefs as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of indigenous religious groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice. To date, protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes. The Constitution was suspended by the military junta that took power during the December 2008 coup d'état and was not reinstated during the reporting period.

The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic and interreligious tensions. On January 14, 2009, the junta appointed a new Secretary General and promoted the position to the cabinet level. The new Secretary General actively promoted religious tolerance and appointed 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, represented by the military junta effective December 23, 2008, observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Christmas.

The Government continues to coordinate with the Inter-Religious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. The Secretariat invited all religious groups to participate in recent public forums addressing globalization, religion, and other topics. The Secretariat also consulted with the Council on the management of Conakry's multid denominational cemetery.

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 some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate; however, they were not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. The Government did not expel any religious groups during the reporting period.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. During the reporting period, the Government stated that it registered all groups that submitted applications.

The small Baha'i community practiced its faith openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

There is a general tradition of Islamic schools throughout the country. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region, which was ruled as an Islamic theocracy during the 18th century.

There are a few madrassahs across the country. The schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, other Gulf States, and Libya. 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. Despite ongoing efforts, the Ministry of Education has been unable 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 prohibits ownership of private radio and television by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned commercial radio. The Government allocates 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.

For the first time since independence in 1958, the country has a non-Muslim leader, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the self-proclaimed president who is Christian.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the regime during the reporting period.

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

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 is allowed by the Government, it sometimes results in rejection or persecution by families and communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and senior religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy officials raised religious freedom concerns with senior officials at the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, the senior imams of Conakry and Labe, and other religious leaders outside the capital.
