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U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Togo

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TOGO

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. 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 yet to take action on such a law. 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. The population is about 30 percent Catholic, 25 percent Sunni Muslim, and 20 percent Protestant. The remaining 25 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.

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in local and the central government.

Missionary groups represent Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

In January President Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Protestant, invited Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant leaders to an ecumenical prayer service to commemorate the anniversary of his military takeover. Unlike previous years, the Catholic Church declined the invitation to the "day of national liberation" service, on the stated grounds that it believed it was inappropriate to hold a worship service in a government building. The Government criticized the Catholic Church for boycotting the prayer service and not contributing to national reconciliation, and suggested that most parishioners did not share the decision. The pro-opposition newspaper *La Tribune Africaine* sided with the Catholic Church and commented that it was preferable for religious organizations to follow the Catholic Church's example and remain neutral in political affairs. In a significant development, the Catholic Church under the leadership of the Archbishop of Lome has stopped delivering political sermons that praise President Eyadema. The Archbishop's predecessor used his pulpit to praise the President, but those sermons alienated the congregation, which called for his 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. In August 1998, the CNDH held an in-house seminar that included a lecture on the religious, philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of human rights.

In February 1999, the Government intervened on behalf of Mecca-bound Muslims who were having difficulties obtaining travel documents and transit visas from the Gendarmerie.

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.

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 Government's 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 is debating 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 discussed a broad range of religious issues, including religious freedom, during a December 1998 meeting with the Lome Catholic Archbishop, and during a May 1999 meeting with the President of the Christian Council and the Moderator for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. In addition, the Embassy had discussions with Muslim leaders and with the head of the Jehovah's Witnesses during the period covered by this report.

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