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Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During discussions with government officials, U.S. embassy representatives urged the government to respect the rights of all religious groups, especially those of religious minorities. The U.S. embassy also supported interfaith activities and events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is 10.9 million, according to a U.S. government source. 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 their religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni, although the population of Shias is

increasing. 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. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, large cities, the south, and the eastern Forest Region. Indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high as a result of the close ties between cultural rituals and religious practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice.

The Secretariat of Religious Affairs aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic tensions. The 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 general inspector.

The government coordinates with the Interreligious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches, and the Secretariat of Religious Affairs.

By law, the Secretariat of Religious Affairs must approve all religious groups, which must then register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs. Registration entitles religious groups to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and to select energy subsidies. Once registered, each religious group must present the government a report on its affairs every six months.

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 and political parties may not own private radio and television stations, but the government permits religious and political

broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio. The government allocates broadcast time during the week on state-owned national television for both Islamic and Christian programming, including Sunday mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

The compulsory primary school curriculum does not include religious studies. Islamic schools are prevalent throughout the country and are the traditional forum for religious education. Some Islamic schools are private, while others receive local government support. Islamic schools, particularly common in the Fouta Djallon region, teach the compulsory government curriculum along with additional Quranic studies. Christian schools, which accept students of all religious groups, exist in the nation's capital and most other big cities. Christian schools are private and include prayers before school. Although they do not receive government support, Christian schools teach a curriculum that fulfills the government's compulsory primary school education requirement.

There are several madrassahs, usually associated with a mosque. Unlike Islamic schools, they do not teach the national primary school curriculum, teach in Arabic rather than French, and focus on Quranic studies. The government does not recognize madrassahs, which are not linked with the public school system and do not fulfill compulsory curriculum requirements. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states support some madrassahs.

There are seminaries to train Catholic priests. Persons wishing to become imams may train with a local scholar or travel abroad to Senegal, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or other Muslim states.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry are government employees.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the government continued to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. Some publicly funded and supported universities did not schedule classes on Friday afternoons so that students could attend prayers at the mosque.

The Secretariat of Religious Affairs facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims but provided no similar service to the Christian community.

The government approved all religious group registration applications. According to the Secretariat of Religious Affairs, several unregistered religious groups operated freely but did not receive the tax and other benefits received by registered groups. The small Bahai community practiced openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In some parts of the country, strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam.

There was no government restriction on conversion from Islam to Christianity, or between any religious groups. However, missionaries reported that conversion sometimes resulted in rejection or persecution by families and communities. The Secretariat for Religious Affairs confirmed that a woman was forced into exile by her community after she converted to Christianity. The town of Dinguiraye, a holy city for African Muslims, reportedly did not permit public celebrations of non-Muslim religious holidays or festivals, and town authorities refused permission to build a church within its confines.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives engaged the government and civil society on religious freedom and tolerance issues. An embassy-hosted iftar included government officials and local religious leaders. The ambassador and other embassy officials also met with religious leaders during visits to cities and villages outside of the nation's capital.