

Togo (69)



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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, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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. Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of 21,006 square miles. Its Office of Population Planning estimated the population to be 4,740,000 in 2001. The most recent available statistics regarding religious demography were published by the Demographic Research Unit of University of Lome in 2000, which states that the population is approximately 33 percent animist (traditional religion), 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consists of followers of other faiths, including other various Christian (9.8 percent), other non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and no affiliated religion (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continue to perform rituals originating in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but is thought to be small. Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions.

Missionary groups active in the country represent Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 which are recognized officially. 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, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. 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.

The Government recognizes 97 religious groups, of which most are smaller Protestant groups and some new Muslim groups. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations, allowing them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years. For example, the Baptist Mission Hospital has been practicing in the country for more than 15 years but did not receive its final authorization until 2001. In 2000, 38 religious groups submitted applications to the government requesting official recognition. Since 1991, 317 groups applied for recognition. The Muslim Union of Togo reports that since 1991, a total of 52 Islamic groups have registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Islamic radio and television enterprises. The criteria for recognition are based on the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. For

example, in 2001, a pastor was arrested, sentenced, and jailed for 3 months, based upon complaints of his congregation that he had planted fetish objects inside the church. He was released but forbidden by law to practice for 3 years. There was no information available regarding the number of rejections or details about the groups that had been rejected. If an application provides insufficient information for recognition to be granted, the application often remains open indefinitely.

There are no special requirements for foreign missionary groups, which are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive money from the Government.

The Government-owned television station, TV Togo, and the Ministry of Communication sponsored a program during the period covered by this report to foster Islamic-Christian understanding.

In January, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Protestant, once again invited Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders to an ecumenical prayer service to commemorate the anniversary of his military takeover. Eyadema has invited these religious leaders to this service for at least 10 years. For the fifth 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.

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.

According to an international NGO, in 2000 the authorities established an interministerial commission to investigate the activities of all religious groups in the country whose mode of worship allegedly harms the welfare of society. The Prime Minister expressed concern about the methods of worship by religious groups that beat cymbals and drums at night; however, the Government took no measures to restrict these groups during the period covered by this report.

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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter-marriage across religious lines is common.

The Christian Council addresses 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 continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborate through the Biblical Alliance.

Under the leadership of the Archbishop of Lome, the Catholic Church continued 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 former Archbishop's dismissal.

In June 2002, a few months before the anticipated legislative elections, the Conference of Bishops in Togo entered the political arena by publishing and disseminating a letter to citizens designed to promote conditions for effective, fair, and transparent elections. In September 2002, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo also addressed a "Pastoral Letter" to its members and all citizens that stated that the

country must be governed "through effective pluralist democracy" and "through credible, transparent, and fair elections." In September the Methodist Church also published a letter highlighted the serious economic situation of the population and called for action by responsible political leaders.

In March, the Bishops of the Catholic Church of Togo released another public message criticizing the Government for unfair legislative elections, modification of the Constitution, modification of electoral code, and the creation of a nonindependent Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI).

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

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