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2014 Report on International Religious Freedom - Burkina Faso

Executive Summary

The constitution states the country is a secular state, and both it and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice.

Following the resignation of President Blaise Compaore on October 31, representatives of religious communities took part in discussions with the military, political parties, and civil society organizations to form a transitional government. As in previous years, the former government partially subsidized travel costs for Muslim pilgrims going to the Hajj, and allocated subsidies to the three main religious communities.

There was a dispute involving the conversion of a traditional chief's wives to Protestantism, and there was a protest by a Shia community over plans to build a Sunni mosque.

To promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue, the U.S. embassy sponsored the visit of a Muslim cleric to the United States and an iftar and ceremony in a Ouagadougou mosque, met with religious leaders, and delivered speeches to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 18.4 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2006 general census, 61 percent is Muslim, predominantly Sunni, 19 percent is Roman Catholic, 4 percent belongs to various Protestant groups, and 15 percent maintains exclusively indigenous beliefs. Less than 1 percent is atheist or belongs to other religious groups. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Muslims and Christians often adhere simultaneously to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced throughout the country, especially in rural communities. The capital has a mixed Muslim and Christian population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is secular, and both it and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. After the resignation of President Blaise Compaore on October 31, the new authorities temporarily suspended the constitution, but this decision did not affect religious freedom in practice.

The law requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security. The registration process usually takes about three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA francs (\$93). Registration confers legal status but no specific obligations or benefits. Failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$93 to \$278).

Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group.

Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools and some schools of higher education. Although by law school officials, religious or otherwise, must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools with the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The government reviews the curricula of most religious schools to ensure they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, the majority of Quranic schools are not registered and their curricula are not reviewed.

Government Practices

The transitional government established after the resignation of President Compaore had not announced or implemented any measures affecting religious freedom by year's end.

The former government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications.

The former government did not fund religious schools, nor did it require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. Likewise, the former government taxed religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

The former government allocated 75 million CFA francs (\$139,200) annually to each of the Muslim, Catholic and Protestant communities. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security, the government may have provided an additional subsidy when the religious community or organization pursued a mission of general interest, such as education, health, or vocational training; when the religious community conducted an activity of national interest, such as promoting peace or social stability; or when the success or failure of an activity may have affected a significant part of the population, as in the case of religious pilgrimages. For example, the former government partially subsidized travel costs for the 5,500 Muslim pilgrims going on the Hajj in 2014 so that the cost to the travelers would be the same as in previous years.

Following dissent by the political opposition and civil society, including some religious groups, the former government continued to postpone implementation of a law enacted in 2013 creating a senate that would include representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim communities.

After the resignation of Compaore, representatives of these three religious communities were included in the discussions with the military, political parties, and civil society organizations to create a charter for the country's transitional government. Representatives of religious groups were included in the transitional government as members of a "college" formed to select the president of the transitional government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security, a traditional chief of Godin village in the Bazega province tried to oust a local pastor who had in May reportedly converted two of the chief's wives to Protestantism. Government authorities and local leaders reached out to both parties and settled the dispute peacefully. Traditional chiefs lacked legal status but were influential in their communities.

In March mostly Shia residents of Nagreongo in the Plateau Central region protested plans by the Sunni community to build a mosque. Local authorities and Muslim religious leaders initiated a mediation process to resolve the conflict.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy held several events, visited religious leaders, and funded a project to promote religious freedom.

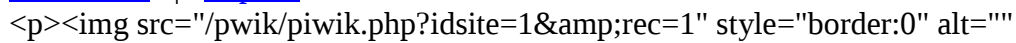
On June 24, the Ambassador attended an event in Ouagadougou that was part of a U.S.-funded project to promote respect and religious tolerance among young people by the Brotherly Union of Believers, an interreligious, nongovernmental organization. At the event the Ambassador delivered a speech promoting religious tolerance to government officials, religious leaders, and young Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant citizens from all regions of the country.

The Ambassador and other embassy officials met separately with Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders throughout the country, at the local and national levels, to encourage their efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and advocate for religious tolerance.

In April the embassy funded the travel of an imam of the Association of Muslim Students of Burkina, the largest Muslim student association, to the United States for a program on U.S. diversity and multiculturalism. He recounted this “positive and enriching” experience of religious tolerance in his speech at an embassy-sponsored iftar at a Ouagadougou mosque in July. The goal of the iftar was to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

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