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2012 International Religious Freedom Report - Ghana

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. Prominent societal leaders, however, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Embassy staff discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially marginalized groups. The embassy organized and sponsored exchange programs and events to promote greater tolerance and mutual understanding.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is 24.6 million, according to the 2010 census. Approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent identifies as belonging to other religious groups or has no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, F'eden, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quaker), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Islamic traditions include Orthodox Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and a small number of Shia.

Many individuals who are nominally Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs. There are also syncretistic groups combining elements of Christianity and Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of Muslims reside in northern areas and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-

Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs resides in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the office of the registrar general within the Justice Ministry to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for other nongovernmental organizations. There were no reports that the government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups did not register.

Registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income. However, religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income.

The Education Ministry includes religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. These courses incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity to encourage students to adopt sound morals and values. There is also an Islamic Education Unit (IEU) within the ministry responsible for coordinating all secular public education activities for Muslim communities.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. Government meetings, receptions, and state funerals used both Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. Throughout the year, the president and vice president made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence.

In June the National Peace Council (NPC), a 13-member board composed of representatives from religious bodies operating under the Interior Ministry, intervened in a conflict in Hohoe between the predominantly Muslim settlers and the indigenous community. The NPC mediated talks between the two sides to promote greater interfaith understanding and tolerance.

The government monitored the conditions of “prayer camps” throughout the country, especially in areas where abuse was reported. Some communities used the camps, operated by self-professed prophets and spiritual healers, as treatment facilities for individuals with physical and mental illnesses and other societal outcasts. This practice was especially prevalent in rural areas, where many families had few options for obtaining appropriate care.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders, however, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In June a traditional chief in Hohoe banned Muslim burials in his area. He directed this ban at a group of predominantly Muslim settlers from the northern regions, instituted after some settlers damaged a hospital following the death of a friend who sought treatment there. Despite the ban, the Muslims buried their recently deceased local imam. Violence broke out after supporters of the traditional chief exhumed the remains of the imam and treated them disrespectfully. The government intervened to restore peace, and the NPC mediated talks between the two sides.

Throughout the year, especially prior to presidential elections in December, prominent religious leaders called publicly for citizens of all faiths to remain tolerant of different religions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy staff discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially for marginalized segments of the population.

Throughout the year, the ambassador and embassy staff met with religious leaders such as the national chief imam and leaders from several Christian groups. In all meetings, embassy staff discussed the importance of religious freedom and tolerance.

Five American high school students spent one year living with Ghanaian Muslim families as part of a U.S. government-funded program. The students participated in programs and activities promoting interfaith dialogue. In one program, the embassy worked with the Ghana Muslim Academy to arrange for the students to observe the celebration of Eid al-Adha and attend a session with Muslim scholars to discuss the practice of Islam in Ghana.

During Ramadan, the embassy organized seminars for religious scholars and students on the importance of promoting intra-faith and interfaith dialogue.

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