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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Cameroon

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government usually respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 183,568 square miles and a population of 20.4 million. 69 percent of the population is Christian, 21 percent Muslim, and 6 percent animist. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Orthodox Jews, the Bahai Faith, and persons who do not associate themselves with any particular religious movement. The Christian population is divided between Roman Catholics (38.4 percent of the total population), Protestants (26.3 percent), and other Christian denominations (including Jehovah's Witnesses) (4 percent).

Muslims and Christians are found in every region, although Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western regions. Large cities have significant populations of both groups. The two Anglophone regions of the western part of the country are largely Protestant, and the Francophone regions of the southern and western areas are mostly Catholic. In the northern regions, the dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mainly Muslim, but the overall population is fairly evenly divided among Muslims, Christians, and followers of indigenous religious beliefs. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Region is predominately Muslim. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced in rural

areas throughout the country but are rarely practiced publicly in cities, in part because many of these beliefs are intrinsically local in character.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government observes the right of individuals to choose and change their religion. It also observes and enforces the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and any citizen has the right to sue the government for the violation of any constitutionally protected freedom.

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the government and religious groups. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) must approve and register religious groups for them to function legally. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition; however, the law prescribes no specific penalties for violations, and numerous unregistered small religious groups operated freely.

In order to register, a religious denomination must legally qualify as a religious congregation. The definition includes "any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship" or "any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine." The denomination then submits a file to MINATD. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and functions of the group's officials. MINATD reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. The president generally follows the recommendation of MINATD and grants authorization by a presidential decree. Although official recognition confers no general tax benefits, it allows religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts for the conduct of their activities.

The government does not register indigenous religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion is a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

The law does not restrict religious publishing or other religious media. The Catholic Church operated one of the two modern private printing presses and published a weekly newspaper, *L'Effort Camerounais*. These private printing presses also printed several privately held secular newspapers. The state-sponsored television station and radio stations broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services on a regular basis, as well as religious ceremonies on national holidays and during national events.

Several religious denominations operated primary and secondary schools. The law charges the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education with ensuring that private schools run by religious groups meet the same standards as state-operated schools in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training. The government gives an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including those operated by religious denominations. There were also several religious universities in the country.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Feast of the Lamb, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Christians and Muslims organized ecumenical ceremonies, including a November 25 Prayer Breakfast, to pray and promote a spirit of tolerance and peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.
