

2013 Report on International Religious Freedom - Burkina Faso

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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 government partially subsidized travel costs for Muslim pilgrims going to Mecca. In May the government passed an implementing law for a constitutional amendment adopted in 2012 that allotted seats in a newly formed Senate to representatives of the main religious communities.

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

The U.S. embassy held several events during the year to promote religious freedom and funded a project to promote religious tolerance and respect among young people.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 17.8 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 61 percent is Muslim, the majority Sunni. Approximately 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/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

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

The government 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 (\$105). Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. Failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$105 to \$316).

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.

The government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

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

The government does not fund religious schools, nor does it require them to pay taxes unless they conduct for-profit activities. The government reviews the curricula of most religious schools to ensure they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, the majority of Quranic schools have not been registered with the Ministry of Education.

Government Practices

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications. Some missionary groups complained about the complicated bureaucratic procedures, which were the same for all religious groups.

The government partially subsidized travel costs for the 4,400 Muslim pilgrims going on the Hajj so that the cost to the travelers would be the same as 2012. Journalists estimated the cost to the government was approximately 470 million CFA francs (\$990,000).

In May the government enacted a law to implement a constitutional amendment establishing a senate that included representatives of the Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant communities. The government, however, delayed the formation of the senate, in part because of criticism from the media, nongovernmental organizations, and the religious communities themselves, over the

appropriateness of religious groups taking part in the legislative process. Some members of religious groups opposed their participation in the senate because of a possible conflict of interest given the secular nature of the state, not out of expressed concern it would limit religious freedom.

The president granted a large plot of government-owned land in Ouagadougou in October to the Catholic Church to construct a new nunciature. The building will also house the headquarters of the Pope John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel.

In October the High Council for Communication (FCC equivalent) reprimanded an Islamic TV station, Al Houda, for a September broadcast by a Muslim theologian that criticized other religions, specifically Christianity. Station executives stated they had no prior knowledge of what the theologian would say. The High Council announced that the broadcast violated laws on religious tolerance and advised the station to exercise more care in the future.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

There were two reports of protests based on religious affiliation and practice. One involved a small group of young Muslims protesting a meeting between the Grand Imam and the Archbishop of Ouagadougou in December 2012. Representatives of the Muslim community subsequently issued a statement in January condemning the protest and calling for religious tolerance. In the village of Pouytenga, parents of 75 Muslim students withdrew them from a Catholic school after the introduction of new uniforms displaying the Christian cross, and a local Wahhabi imam reportedly called for a boycott of the school. These protests were resolved peacefully by members of the communities concerned.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

The U.S. embassy provided \$15,000 to fund a project of the interreligious nongovernmental organization, the Brotherly Union of Believers. The project was designed to create a framework for 2,000 young people to learn to respect and tolerate each others' religion and promote the idea that divergent religious beliefs should not be a source of conflict but an opportunity for mutual enrichment. Four major cities will host the project.

The U.S. embassy hosted a multifaith iftar in August with Muslim clerics, government officials, civil society leaders, and journalists to promote religious tolerance.

The Deputy Chief of Mission and other embassy officials traveled in May with a visiting U.S. jazz fusion band to Bobo-Dioulasso to visit the Salam Franco-Arab School and meet with officials and students. They discussed religious tolerance and the Islamic school's curriculum with administrators and with students from first grade through high school.

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