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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Guinea

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 transitional government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. The constitution decreed by interim President Sekouba Konate in May 2010 states that the principle of religious freedom will not be subject to revision.

There were no credible 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 94,926 square miles and a population of 10 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent is Christian, and 5 percent holds indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims are generally Sunni, although the few Shia are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Bahai community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Some Muslims and Christians incorporate indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four major regions. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the south, and in the eastern Forest Region. Christians also reside in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon Region in the middle of the country, where Islam is deeply intertwined with Pular (Fulani or Peuhl) culture and society. Indigenous

religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high as a result of the close ties between traditional cultural rituals and religious practices.

Immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same religious beliefs as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of indigenous religious practices.

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 constitution provides for the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice. Protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes.

The Secretariat of Religious Affairs aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic and interreligious tensions. The secretary general of religious affairs appoints six national directors to lead the offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs and the Endowment, and General Inspector.

The government coordinates with the Interreligious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Secretariat of Religious Affairs.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and select energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate; however, they were not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. Unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. The government did not expel any religious groups during the reporting period.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat of Religious Affairs. During the reporting period, the government registered all groups that submitted applications. The small Bahai community practiced its faith openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

The government prohibits ownership of private radio and television stations by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned commercial radio. The government allocates broadcast time during the week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national television, including Sunday Mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

Islamic schools are prevalent throughout the country and are considered the traditional forum for religious education. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region.

There are a few madrassahs (schools), which differ from Islamic schools, across the country. These schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, other Gulf States, and Libya. The madrassahs are not formally linked with the public school system and are not recognized by the government because they teach only Arabic and Islam. Despite continuing efforts, the Ministry of Education has been unable to integrate the madrassahs into the government financed "Franco-Arab" system, which offers religious instruction in addition to a curriculum comparable to the public schools.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry are government employees.

The transitional government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, 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.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. For example, universities close on Friday so Muslim students can go to mosque but schedule classes on Sunday, preventing Christian students from attending church. Additionally, the Secretariat of Religious Affairs facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims but did not provide any similar service to the Christian community.

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

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

There were no credible reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, in some parts of the country, strong cultural, social, and economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. The missionary community reported that while conversion from Islam to Christianity was allowed by the government, it sometimes resulted in rejection or persecution by families and communities.

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.
