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Ghana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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

There were some 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 92,098 square miles and a population of 24 million. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, 8.5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6.9 percent is classified as other religious groups, which includes those who profess no religious beliefs. Some members of the Muslim community disputed these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is substantially larger. Many persons who are nominally Christian or Muslim also practiced some aspects of indigenous beliefs.

Christian groups 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, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Several Islamic traditions are present in the country: Orthodox Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufi, and a small number of Shi'a.

Indigenous religious groups include Afrikania. Other religious groups include the Baha'i, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Shintoist, Ninchiren Shoshu, Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarian. There are also some syncretistic groups that combine elements of Christianity and Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population resided in northern areas as well as in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of indigenous religious beliefs resided in rural areas. Christians lived throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Government employees, including the president, are required to swear an oath upon taking office. The oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual.

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

There is no government body that regulates religious affairs, as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Office of the Registrar General to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were no reports that the government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register.

The government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions were exempted from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable and educational activities that did not generate income; however,

religious organizations were required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generated income.

The Ministry of Education included religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum.

The government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, Christian and Muslim prayers are recited; occasionally there are indigenous invocations. Throughout the reporting period, the president and vice president made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. In March 2010 President Mills declared a National Prayer and Thanksgiving Day for Muslims, Christians, and traditional believers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom 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 religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

Traditional village authorities and families continued to banish rural women, often older women and widows, accused of witchcraft. Fellow villagers identified these women as the cause of difficulties such as illness, crop failure, or financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps," villages in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions that are populated by suspected witches. The women did not face formal legal sanctions if they returned home; however, most feared they would be beaten or killed if they returned to their village or attempted to pursue legal action to challenge the charges against them.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus indigenous practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Some religious leaders actively advocated tolerance toward other religious groups and discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, and harassment; others, particularly laypersons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other groups such as Muslims and indigenous religious groups.

Some Muslims expressed a sense of political and social exclusion, citing token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, the preponderance of Christian prayers in public settings, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans as contributing to this perception of marginalization and discrimination within the Muslim community. However, the Mills administration appointed several Muslim ministers, and all the major political parties campaigned actively in Muslim communities during the 2008 electoral season.

Government agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, campaigned against Trokosi, a practice in the Volta region of pledging youth (commonly young females) to extended service at indigenous shrines. Afrikania and other supporters of traditional African religious groups accused human rights NGOs of misrepresenting their beliefs and regarded government and NGO campaigns against Trokosi as religious persecution.

There were many incidences of human rights abuses at prayer camps, typically Pentecostal, where persons, often with mental illness, were chained for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water in the name of removing evil spirits. Reports indicated that these practices extended to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, Volta, and Brong Ahafo regions. Mental health care is limited in the country; families, especially in rural communities, have few options for obtaining appropriate care.

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.

The ambassador and embassy personnel met with religious leaders and attended religious holiday events, including iftars (evening meal during Ramadan), Christmas, and other religious celebrations throughout the year. Under the auspices of the State Department's Youth Exchange and Study program, 19 Muslim students spent a year in the United States attending high school and living with American families. The embassy also sent two individuals to an International Visitor Leadership Program seminar on "U.S. Political Process for Young Muslim Leaders." The embassy facilitated the national chief imam's travel to the United States and set up a meeting with the department's special representative to Muslim communities.

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