

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	287
Land:	Cameroun
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon
Udgivet:	15. maj 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	31. maj 2023

2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits religious harassment, and provides for freedom of religion and worship.

According to media reports and religious leaders, most abuses involving religious freedom continued to occur in the predominantly English-speaking Northwest and Southwest Regions, where violence associated with the separatist crisis continued. Because religion, ethnicity, and political ideology are closely linked, it was often difficult to determine whether incidents were predominantly motivated by religion. Security forces disrupted religious services while pursuing armed separatists, detained religious leaders suspected of aiding separatists, detained a pastor accused of defaming Islam, and instructed the pastor of an evangelical Christian church to avoid raising sociopolitical issues during his sermons. Religious leaders expressed frustration with the government's long-running failure to register new religious groups and said many requests were pending, some for a decade or longer.

The U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) launched violent attacks against local communities, disrupted church activities, and caused Christians to live in fear in the Far North Region. The overall number of terrorist incidents, however, significantly decreased compared to preceding years, according to the newspaper *L'Oeil du Sahel*. Media outlets reported that between January and June, recurrent attacks by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA resulted in the pillaging of churches, arson, and deaths.

Armed separatist groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions set fire to churches and kidnapped numerous religious leaders and dozens of seminary students. Throughout the year, Muslim and Christian leaders initiated interfaith activities aimed at facilitating interreligious dialogue, promoting peaceful coexistence of different religious groups, combating hate speech, and seeking a peaceful resolution to the country's multiple crises. In January, during a worship service at Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in Bonadibong, Douala, a Pentecostal Christian smashed multiple statues that he described as a form of idolatry. In March, members of the mostly Christian population in Esu, Northwest Region, burned down the local mosque following the killing of their traditional leader by suspected Muslim Mbororo herders. In July, suspected separatists kidnapped and killed four Muslim Mbororo herders in Wum, Northwest Region. In July, a woman died from injuries she sustained during a brawl between rival Christian factions in a power struggle at a Protestant church in Kaele, Far North Region. In September, villagers who practice the local traditional religion in Bafang, West Region, tied up and

whipped Pentecostal Christians who had entered the palace of a traditional ruler and burned skulls found inside.

In March, U.S. embassy officials traveled to the Far North Region and discussed with local Muslim leaders how religious deradicalization could be integrated into the government's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program for former Boko Haram combatants. In September and October, embassy officials discussed gender empowerment in Muslim societies, attendance at Quranic schools, and the importance of formal education in facilitating a coordinated approach to the government by faith-based organizations, particularly Pentecostals, whom, according to religious representatives, the government viewed as less organized than their "mainstream" Christian counterparts. In July, during a trip to Buea, Southwest Region, the Ambassador discussed jointly with Christian and Muslim leaders the important role of faith-based organizations in promoting peace, conflict resolution, and vocational training. In other engagements with Muslim and Christian leaders, embassy officials discussed interreligious dialogue, hate speech, and social cohesion and explored ways in which religious groups could leverage their support and credibility with local populations to promote peace.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 29.3 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2005 census, the most recent available, 69.2 percent of the population are Christian, 20.9 percent Muslim, 5.6 percent animist, and 1.0 percent belong to other religions; 3.2 percent report no religious affiliation. Among Christians, 55.5 percent are Roman Catholic, 38 percent Protestant, and 6.5 percent other Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Orthodox churches. The 2020 Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project found that 38.3 percent of Christians are Catholic, and 31.4 percent are Protestant. There is a growing number of Christian revivalist churches.

Christians reside primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The Northwest and Southwest Regions are largely Protestant, and the South, Center, East, Littoral, and West Regions are mostly Catholic. The Mbororo ethnic community is mostly Muslim and is located primarily in the North, Far North, Northwest, Adamawa, and East Regions, where the highest percentage of Muslims also reside; the Bamoun ethnic group is also predominantly Muslim and located in the West Region. Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits harassment or discrimination on grounds of religion, and provides for freedom of religion.

The law on freedom of association governs relations between the government and religious groups. The government must approve religious groups or institutions as a prerequisite for lawful operation. Although the law prescribes no specific penalties for operating without official registration, the government may suspend the activities of unregistered groups. The government does not require Indigenous religious groups to register, characterizing the practice of traditional religion as a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

To become a registered entity, a religious group must legally qualify as a religious congregation, defined as “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 entity must submit a request for registration as a religious group and include with it the group’s charter describing planned activities, names and functions of the group’s officials, and a declaration of commitment to comply with the law on freedom of association to the relevant local office. The relevant local office then forwards the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT).

MINAT reviews the file and sends it to the Presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. Registration is granted by presidential decree. Official registration confers no general tax benefits but allows religious groups to receive real estate for the conduct of activities as a tax-free gift and to gather publicly and worship. It also permits missionaries for registered groups to receive visas with longer validity than do missionaries for unregistered entities. Unregistered religious groups may gather publicly and worship under a policy of “administrative tolerance” as long as public security and peace are not disturbed.

MINAT may issue an order to suspend any religious group for “disturbing public order,” although no legislation defines these terms. The president may dissolve any previously authorized religious organization that “deviates from its initial focus.”

The Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education require private religious schools to comply with the same curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher-training standards as state-operated schools. Unlike public schools, private schools may offer religious education.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Media and religious leaders said most abuses of religious freedom were related to the crisis involving English-speaking separatists in the Northwest and Southwest Regions and the activities of nonstate actors in the Far North Region. Because religion, ethnicity, and political ideology are closely linked, it was often difficult to determine whether incidents were predominantly motivated by religion.

On September 10, security forces occupied the Baptist church in Bamkika, Kumbo, Northwest Region, as part of an operation to ambush separatists. The security forces detained Christians who arrived to clean the church building and locked them inside a room. The security forces later exchanged gunfire with separatists, leading to injuries on both sides, as well as minor injuries to the churchgoers. After the fighting, the security forces released the detained civilians and moved out of the church compound.

In October, according to a priest of Kumbo Diocese, soldiers fired shots at the parsonage of the Roman Catholic Immaculate Conception Parish in Tobin, Northwest Region. The priest said bullets penetrated the walls in multiple places and destroyed several windows. The shooting interrupted classes at a Catholic nursery school on the church compound and forced schoolchildren to hide under desks and benches. According to the priest, the soldiers said they were chasing separatists who had run in the direction of the church compound.

On October 18, the military arrested the pastor of the Baptist church in Kakar, Donga Mantung, Northwest Region, two days after separatists killed two soldiers near a security post. The military said

the separatists passed through the church compound after killing the soldiers and that although the pastor was aware of their presence, he did not inform the authorities. The soldiers additionally arrested seven other Christians because they also allegedly did not inform security forces after learning about the presence of separatists. The pastor was released after a few days, but the other Christians remained in detention. According to a pastor of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), in November, the military transferred the Christians to Nkambe, Donga Mantung, where they were charged in court with collaborating with separatists. The government later dropped the charges and released the Christians.

In January, two individuals dressed in military uniforms abducted Tobias Bekong, a Catholic priest at St. Charles Langwa Parish in Molyko, Buea, Southwest Region. A video showing the two men dragging the priest to an unknown destination was widely circulated on social media. According to the Vatican News Agency, Bekong's captors released him late at night on the same day. Multiple media outlets questioned the identity of the abductors, with some attributing the kidnapping to government forces and others to separatists. During an October 2 media interview about the kidnappings, the communications director Humphrey Tata Mbui of the Cameroon National Episcopal Conference (CNEC), the country's Catholic bishops' organization, said armed actors on both sides of the violence were increasingly targeting the clergy, mainly because of their ransom value, despite the church's assertion that it does not pay ransom.

In July, police in Kumba, Southwest Region, arrested Pentecostal pastor and radio host Alain Favour after Muslims complained about the airing of his religious views, which they considered blasphemous to Islam. The Muslims complained to the Divisional Officer (DO) of Kumba I that during the program "Hour of Truth" on Ocean City Radio, Favour used the Quran to preach that the Prophet Abraham was not a Muslim, and he challenged those with contrary views. In addition to ordering Favour's arrest, the DO suspended the radio program. After he spent nearly a week in jail, the government released Favour when he paid a fine and pledged to cease preaching about Islam and Muslim practices.

In June, the Yaoundé Administrative Court ruled in favor of the government in a lawsuit filed by Annette Engoka, who accused the government of having violated the right to religious freedom of her daughter, Annick Engoka. In 2017, the principal of Government Bilingual High School, Joseph Ndikimimeki, expelled Annick for repeatedly refusing to sing the national anthem because of her religious convictions as a Jehovah's Witness. The court ruled that the country is a secular state that does not take into account the religious affiliation of students and upheld the decision to expel Annick Engoka from the school.

During the year, parents of Jehovah's Witnesses students took three additional cases to the Supreme Court over reported violations of religious freedom. The parents were appealing local administrative decisions to expel their children from school for not participating in patriotic ceremonies, such as singing the national anthem.

In June, Regina Tembu Enjoh, DO of Bandja, West Region, accompanied by armed security officers, interrupted the funeral of a traditional dignitary, Paul Zeukom Kontchoua, and compelled his family to close his tomb and construct a new one at a different location, as indicated by the local traditional leader. Tembu Enjoh said it was her role to support traditional leaders and their local customs, including rituals associated with the burial of traditional dignitaries. According to Zeukom Kontchoua's family, the DO's decision violated the wishes of the deceased, who had indicated where he should be buried. They said the relocation of the tomb violated their religious rights since in their tradition, the

tomb is a family sanctuary and a sacred site for ancestor worship, as practiced by the Bamileke ethnic group in the West Region.

In May, the DO of Douala I municipality, Issa Daouda, criticized a worship service organized at the Evangelical Church of Cameroon (ECC) and warned the pastor to avoid raising sociopolitical issues during future religious services. In a letter addressed to the pastor, Daouda said that during the celebration of Ascension on May 26, the church allowed a traditional leader to talk about the government's controversial eviction of hundreds of residents from occupied lands in the Bali-Dikolo neighborhood, Douala. He accused the ECC of fomenting unrest instead of remaining apolitical and warned the pastor to refrain from transforming worship services into political meetings.

The government took no action to adjudicate applications for the registration of several religious groups that had been pending for years. The government had approved only one new religious group in the previous 19 years and none since 2010. Although by law groups must register, the government continued to allow hundreds of unregistered small religious groups to operate freely under a policy of "administrative tolerance." According to multiple members of the Cameroon Association for Interreligious Dialogue (ACADIR), the government remained reluctant to register Pentecostal churches because they lacked the hierarchical and organizational structures that characterized "mainstream" religious groups such as Roman Catholics and Muslims. They said the government viewed Pentecostal churches as a source of chaos whose members disregarded noise nuisance regulations and whose leaders often lacked formal education. In October, a member of the Pentecostal Sunrise Pastors' Council (SPC) said the government closed significantly fewer Pentecostal churches during the year as relations improved following a meeting between SPC and MINAT. He said the SPC had engaged to educate its pastors and better coordinate the functioning of churches. He questioned the legality of the requirement for faith-based organizations to register with the government, described the registration process as unduly complicated, and called on the government to clarify the legal status of unregistered religious groups.

The government continued to grant broad legal authority to traditional leaders to manage their districts. As part of this authority, traditional leaders continued to exercise control over local mosques, with the right to appoint or dismiss imams. Traditional leaders did not have this same authority over the appointment or dismissal of other religious figures.

State-sponsored radio stations and the sole state-sponsored television station continued to broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and ceremonies regularly on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers and other officials often attended these ceremonies.

The government provided an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including religious schools. The size of the subsidy was proportional to the size of the student body.

ACTIONS BY FOREIGN FORCES AND NONSTATE ACTORS

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued to commit terrorist acts in the Far North Region in what observers said was an attempt to impose their religious and political beliefs. Boko Haram continued to target Muslims, Christians, and traditionalist believers without apparent distinction, while ISIS-WA tended to target and attack military installations and other government property more than civilians.

According to the Christian advocacy and aid organization, Aid to the Church in Need International, since the end of 2021, Boko Haram and ISIS-WA had been targeting civilians with regular attacks that

disrupted religious life and slowed down pastoral activities, causing many Christians to live in fear. According to the international nongovernmental organization (NGO) Open Doors, while there was a significant decrease in reported incidents of violence in the country during the year, the number of terrorist attacks remained high, as Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued to attack local communities in the Far North Region, especially near the border with Nigeria. Open Doors described problems facing the country's Christians as mostly due to Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks in the Far North Region, where worshippers were most vulnerable to Islamist extremist violence.

According to media outlets, between January and June, recurrent attacks by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA resulted in the pillaging of at least 10 churches in Mayo Tsanaga Division.

According to media reports, in April, Boko Haram killed one civilian and set fire to a church during a night attack in the locality of Bargaram.

In June, local media reported that during a May 31 attack, suspected Boko Haram terrorists ransacked Hitawa village and killed 10 persons, including four members of a local evangelical church.

According to bishops of the Roman Catholic Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference (BAPEC), on September 16, at least 30 unidentified individuals set fire to St. Mary's Catholic Church in Nchang, Mamfe, Southwest Region, and abducted nine individuals. The abductees included five priests, a nun, one catechist, and two other Christians. The Bishop of Mamfe, Aloysius Fondong Abangalo, visited the ruins of the church on September 18 and said that as a result of the attack, most Christians did not attend the following Sunday's worship service. BAPEC attributed the attack to separatists who regularly accused the church of not supporting the secession of the Northwest and Southwest regions from Cameroon. They said that since the separatist crisis began in 2016, separatists had increasingly threatened and targeted church leaders and missionaries, who were "facing a wave of persecution." During a September 21 media interview, BAPEC leader Archbishop Andrew Nkea said kidnappers had demanded a 66 million CFA (\$108,000) ransom, which they later reduced to 33 million CFA (\$54,000). He said the separatists viewed the church as a soft target from which to make money and that the church had rejected the ransom demands because it did not want to set a dangerous precedent. On October 22, the separatists released all nine victims, three days after a viral video portrayed them in captivity, begging the church to meet the demands of their kidnappers. The abductees identified their captors as the Freedom Fighters of Ambazonia. According to media reports, the church denied paying any ransom to the kidnappers.

In April, unidentified armed men kidnapped 33 seminarians at the Bachuo Ntai Roman Catholic Major Seminary in Manyu, Southwest Region. CNEC communications director Tata Mbui told media outlets that the kidnappers intercepted the seminarians as they drove toward their dormitory and took them into the forest. He said the kidnappers demanded a 25 million CFA (\$41,000) ransom for their victims, which they later reduced to six million CFA (\$10,000). According to Tata Mbui, the kidnappers released all 33 seminarians after 24 hours, without receiving any ransom from the Catholic Church.

On September 26, separatists kidnapped Roman Catholic priest Sergius Shiyntum from the parish compound in Vekovi, Bui Division, Northwest Region, and took him to an unknown destination. A video that circulated on social media hours after the abduction showed Shiyntum barefoot and seated on the ground as his captors questioned, shoved, and kicked him. The kidnappers identified themselves as the separatist "Unity Warriors" and said they abducted him for revealing the location of "General Fire," one of their colleagues, at the Bansa Baptist Hospital, where he was later arrested by

security forces. On October 1, media outlets announced Shiyntum's return to Vekovi Parish after his captors released him. The Catholic Church had not clarified the circumstances of his release.

In addition to Roman Catholics, separatists kidnapped multiple leaders of other religious groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions. According to media outlets, in May, separatists led by "General Sha Mao" abducted Musa Tita, Imam of the Baba I Central Mosque in Babessi, Northwest Region. Tita's captors released him several days after his abduction. Musa did not say anything regarding the circumstances of his release. In July, unidentified individuals abducted Reverend Ngo Noah, Field Pastor of the Cameroon Baptist Convention in Fonfuka, Northwest Region, in addition to two other individuals. According to media reports, local residents attributed the abduction to separatists, whom observers accused of torturing their victims before releasing them after collecting ransoms.

According to a Roman Catholic priest of Kumbo Diocese, Northwest Region, during a worship service on October 16, separatists hoisted their flag in front of the church building at St. Therese Mission Station in Tobin Parish and fired weapons for several hours toward the center of the town. The gunfire interrupted a Sunday church service as worshippers locked the doors of the building and lay on the floor for several hours. He said no worshipper was hurt, and they all escaped after the separatists left nearly three hours later.

According to the Imam of the Northwest Region capital of Bamenda, Tukur Mohammed Adamu, in May, separatists threatened him and the Muslim community with violence if they celebrated Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan. He said that because the separatists opposed the religious celebration, they had imposed a one-week lockdown during that period. Mohammed Adamu said Muslims, nonetheless, celebrated the end of Ramadan without any interference by separatists.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because religion, ethnicity, and politics are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On March 9, members of the mostly Christian population in Esu, Menchum, Northwest Region, burned down the local mosque in retaliation following the killing of their traditional ruler, Albert Kawzuh Kum Achuo II, and his wife, Bibiana Duh, two days earlier as they returned from a visit to neighboring Weh village. According to the NGO Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), Esu eyewitnesses placed the blame for Achuo's death on Muslim Mbororo herders, who ambushed him and his family. CHRDA also stated that the pro-Mbororo NGO Justice and Dignity Campaign condemned Achuo's killing, which they blamed on separatists. (According to CHRDA, Christians are perceived as aiding separatists in the north.) Ten leaders of the Muslim community in Menchum denounced Achuo's death in a press release and denied any involvement by their followers.

According to CHRDA, longstanding tensions between Mbororo herders and the Aghem (mostly Christians) who are mostly farmers, were exacerbated by a crisis in which Aghems view Mbororos as government collaborators and Mbororos perceive Aghems as the allies of separatists. CHRDA reported that on July 25, Muslim Mbororo herders attacked the mainly Christian Aghem community in Wum, Northwest Region, killing five individuals and wounding at least 10 others. CHRDA reported that the Mbororos had attacked the Aghem community in retaliation after reports that separatists had abducted and killed four of their kinsmen on July 24. The NGO Justice and Dignity Campaign stated on social media that separatists killed the four Mbororos because of their ethnic and religious identity. Following the Mbororo attacks, the Aghem community mobilized on July 26 to retaliate with sticks,

clubs, and machetes but was intercepted by security forces. In August, the *Post* newspaper said the government was complicit in the Mbororo attacks on the Aghem and accused it of encouraging violence between the two ethnic and religious communities.

In June, a brawl triggered by longstanding tensions among rival parishioners at the Cameroon Lutheran Fraternal Church in Kaele resulted in the suspension of services at the church and the death of one worshipper. Services at the church remained suspended at year's end.

In September, villagers who practice the local, traditional religion in Bafang, West Region, tied up and beat several Pentecostal Christians, whom they accused of attacking their religion when the Pentecostals entered a traditional ruler's palace and burned skulls preserved inside. A video circulated on social media showed the Christians on the ground with their hands and legs tied while several men whipped them as a crowd watched. The villagers described the burning of the skulls as a sacrilege and said the Christians had defiled their culture and religion. In some communities in portions of the West Region, the skulls of corpses are recovered years after burial and preserved within sacred locations for ancestor worship and veneration of the dead.

According to a religious leader of the CBC, late in the night of May 17, Muslim Fulani herders entered the parsonage of the CBC in Fuh village, Donga-Mantung, Northwest Region and beat the pastor and his wife. The herders took money, mobile telephones, computers, and other valuables from the pastor and his wife at gunpoint. The attack took place in the context of repeated clashes in Donga-Mantung between Muslim Fulanis, perceived as government allies, and the mostly Christian local community, perceived as separatist supporters.

In September, inhabitants of Ndogsimbi neighborhood in Douala interrupted a prayer service and physically fought with Christians, whom they accused of generating invasive and unwelcome noise during all-night worship sessions. The two sides fought with clubs and sticks until police arrived and separated them. Neighbors accused the worshippers of transforming the prayer venue from a neighborhood restaurant into an illegal worship center that had become a source of noise pollution. According to the worshippers, the prayer site was a fully functional restaurant whose owner occasionally organized worship services.

On October 30, Christians in the Presbyterian Church Bassa in Douala, Littoral Region, interrupted a Sunday worship service and locked the doors of the church during a protest against the pastor, Philip Nkongho Ndip, whose replacement they demanded. The church at Bassa is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC). During an attempt to prevent protestors from forcibly locking the church, Ndip collapsed and was later hospitalized. Many of the protestors carried placards that bore messages about their frustration with Ndip, characterized his leadership as authoritarian, and called for his departure. The October 30 incident followed longstanding tensions between members of the congregation of Presbyterian Church Bassa and Ndip, who has been pastor of the parish for eight years. On August 4, Presbyterian Church Bassa groups petitioned the PCC national leadership to immediately replace Ndip as their pastor. They accused him of misappropriating church funds, acting unilaterally, and attempting to usurp the role of the congregational chairperson with whom he had repeatedly clashed.

In June, the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Obala, Sosthene Léopold Bayemi, announced that during the night of June 10, unidentified individuals desecrated the tomb of his predecessor, Bishop Jerome Owono Mimboe, who died in 2016. Owono Mimboe's tomb is located at the Marie Mere Admirable Parish in Nkomotou, on the outskirts of Yaoundé. According to parishioners, the

perpetrators destroyed the tomb, which was a place of prayer and devotion for many Christians. Bishop Bayemi described the desecration as an attack both on Christianity and local traditions.

In January, Pentecostal Christian Tongue Mbiya entered the Roman Catholic Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in Bonadibong, Douala, during a worship service and used a hammer to smash multiple statues. A video on social media of the incident showed multiple damaged statues on the floor of the church. After the worshippers subdued Mbiya, he told them he was fully conscious of his actions and said he was on a sacred mission to destroy all statues within Catholic churches, the presence of which he considered a form of idol worship.

According to media reports, in June, the DO of Mutengene, Tiko, Southwest Region, suspended the construction of a mosque, interrupting religious services, after the Southwest Region Council of Imams signaled their opposition to its creation. The council described the sponsor of the project, Hamasani Sule, as a dissident and said that after internal divisions led to his replacement as traditional leader of the Mutengene Muslim community, he decided to break away and create his own mosque at a new site. According to Moussa Oumarou, General Coordinator of the Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries in Cameroon (CIDIMUC), individual Muslims could only create mosques after consulting Islamic authorities, in order to avoid division and chaos within their communities. On June 14, the DO lifted the suspension and allowed Friday prayers to resume at the partially built mosque.

In June, a worship service at the Presbyterian church in Kumba, Southwest Region, ended prematurely after many worshippers walked out in protest following the announcement of elections to replace the congregational chairperson, Comfort Nkele, accused of embezzling 9 million CFA (\$15,000). Outside the church, Nkele's supporters verbally attacked the pastors, Mary Nduma Wose and Vetin Tambi Eyonga, whom they accused of unjustifiably attempting to unseat her. On Sunday, July 3, Nkele's supporters used whistles and trumpets to disrupt Pastor Nduma Wose's sermon and displayed placards calling for her resignation. The disruption forced many worshippers to abandon the service. In August, a video on social media portrayed fetishes at the entrance to the church in Kumba, reportedly placed by Nkele's supporters in order to intimidate the pastors and disrupt worship services. According to a report by the human rights NGO Un Monde Avenir, after Christians disrupted a church service on August 28, Pastor Nduma Wose appealed to police, who arrested two worshippers, including Comfort Nkele, and detained them for two days. Police released them following pressure from worshippers who protested on the streets. On August 30, the chief administrative officer in Kumba, Chamberlin Ntou'ou Ndong, suspended all activities at the Presbyterian church in Kumba, citing persistent tensions among church members. On September 24, the Synod Executive Committee of the PCC announced it had reassigned Nduma Wose and Tambi Eyonga for their personal security and dismissed Nkele for embezzlement. Following the PCC's announcement, Ntou'ou Ndong lifted the suspension of the church at Kumba on September 27.

In January, ACADIR organized a conference in Maroua that focused on the theme, "The Concept of God from the Perspective of Different Religions." Christian and Muslim participants explored the similarities and differences between religious groups and underscored the necessity of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding while respecting the diversity of different faith-based organizations.

In July, Christian and Muslim leaders working with the Rainforest Center for Policy Research initiated a project to counter hate speech through intertribal and interfaith trust-building. During the two-day event, participants explored the drivers of hatred and mistrust among communities and religious groups and developed strategies to identify and counter hate speech.

In August, the Pentecostal Advocate for Socioeconomic Development sensitized the leaders of 50 Pentecostal churches and trained 100 men and women focal points as part of the project, "Revival Churches for Zero COVID-19." The focal points received training on COVID-19 protection measures, testing, and vaccination and were sensitized to act as relays and health agents within their communities.

From October 10 to October 13, the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon organized an interreligious forum on peace, social cohesion, and strategic advocacy in Yaoundé. The forum, which included Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Muslims, explored the security crises in the country and the role of women in promoting peaceful coexistence, community mediation, and sustainable development.

In October, ACADIR distributed hundreds of free manuals to students in six schools in the Far North, West, and Littoral Regions as part of a pilot program aimed at promoting religious freedom and interreligious dialogue among youths. The manual, *Religions and Interreligious Dialogue in Cameroon*, focused on the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious groups, mutual acceptance, and social cohesion and sought to prevent stigmatization and prejudice based on religious affiliation.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In October, during a meeting with an official at the Ministry of Basic Education, embassy officials discussed the role of formal education in facilitating a coordinated approach by Pentecostal religious leaders to the government, which, according to ACADIR, views Pentecostals as less organized than other Christian groups.

In March, embassy officials traveled to the Far North Region, where they met with local Muslim leaders, including Imam Mahamadou Bachirou Sale. Sale and an embassy official explored how religious deradicalization could be integrated into the government's DDR program for former combatants and former associates of Boko Haram. They also discussed how religious psychosocial counselling as part of the DDR process could be a valuable tool for deradicalization.

During meetings with the East Region Delegate of Social Affairs in September, embassy officials raised the implications for children of exclusive attendance at Quranic schools. During a meeting with the Lamido of Garoua in October, embassy officials discussed the role traditional rulers in Muslim societies could play in gender empowerment.

In July, the Ambassador traveled to Buea, Southwest Region, where he discussed the important role of faith-based organizations in peace, conflict resolution, and vocational training programs with the jointly assembled Moderator of the PCC, Reverend Fonki Samuel Forba, the Imam of Buea, Alhaji Mohammed Abubakar, and the Imam of Bamenda, Tukur Mohammed Adamu.

During the year, embassy officials also met with local religious leaders, including the PCC Moderator, the Archbishop of Bamenda, the National Coordinator of ACADIR, the Bishop of the Anglican Church in Cameroon, the National Coordinator of CIDIMUC, leaders of the Pentecostal Sunrise Pastors' Council, and multiple other priests, pastors, and imams. During these meetings, they discussed the contribution of faith-based organizations to social cohesion and explored ways in which religious groups could leverage their support and credibility within local communities to promote national

harmony and peace. They also discussed the role Muslim leaders in particular could play to promote education within their communities.

ecoi.net description:

Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2022)

Country:

Cameroon

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

15 May 2023

Available on ecoi.net since:

16 May 2023

Document ID:

2091918

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Origin and Asylum Research and
Documentation (ACCORD)

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