

Togo (69)



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

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Togo

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 21,006 square miles, and its population is 4,629,000. According to statistics published by the Ministry of Tourism, the population is approximately 22 percent Catholic, 12 percent Sunni Muslim, and 7 percent Protestant. The remaining 59 percent of the population consists of followers of other faiths, including traditional indigenous religions. Many converts to the larger faiths continue to practice some rituals of traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but is thought to be small. Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions.

Missionary groups active in the country represent Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is no state religion.

The Government establishes requirements for recognition of religious organizations outside the three main faiths--Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, which are recognized officially. Applications must be submitted to the Interior Ministry's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The Interior Ministry issues official recognition. The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization.

The Government recognizes 97 religious groups, of which most are smaller Protestant groups and some new Muslim groups. Members of those religions not recognized officially are permitted to practice their religion, but have no legal standing. In 2000, 38 religious groups submitted applications to the government requesting official recognition. Since 1991, 317 groups have applied for recognition. There was no information available regarding the criteria for recognition, the number of rejections, or details about the groups that had been rejected. If an application provides insufficient information for recognition to be granted, the application often remains open indefinitely.

There are no special requirements for foreign missionary groups, which are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive money from the Government.

The Government-owned television station, TV Togo, and the Ministry of Communication sponsored a

program during the period covered by this report to foster Islamic-Christian understanding.

In January 2002, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Protestant, invited Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders to an ecumenical prayer service to commemorate the anniversary of his military takeover. Eyadema has invited these religious leaders to this service for at least 10 years. For the fourth year in a row, the Catholic Church declined the invitation to attend the "Day of National Liberation" service, stating that it is inappropriate to hold a worship service in a government building.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In May 2002, the Government allegedly pressured the leadership of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo to drop disciplinary proceedings against a pastor, who claimed this action was politically motivated. President Eyadema reportedly ordered the church to reinstate the pastor; however, when the synod refused, he dropped the issue and told them to resolve the matter internally.

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion and states explicitly that "no political party should identify itself with a region, an ethnic group, or a religion." Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in local and the central government.

According to an international nongovernmental organization (NGO), in 2000 the authorities established an interministerial commission to investigate the activities of all religious groups in the country whose mode of worship allegedly harms the welfare of society. The Prime Minister expressed concern about the methods of worship by religious groups that beat cymbals and drums at night; however, the Government took no measures to restrict these groups during the period covered by this report.

The 17-member National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), elected by the National Assembly, includes Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant representatives. The CNDH hears appeals by religious organizations that the Government has disallowed principally for disturbing the peace. For example, in past years, members of Jehovah's Witnesses were not allowed to practice their faith because they would not take an oath to the national flag; however, this restriction was eased in 1998.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter-marriage across religious lines is common.

The Christian Council was founded in 1978 to address common issues among Protestant denominations. The Council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-Day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The Council continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborate through the Biblical Alliance.

Under the leadership of the Archbishop of Lome, the Catholic Church continued to refrain from delivering political sermons praising President Eyadema. The Archbishop's predecessor had used the pulpit to praise the President, but such sermons alienated the congregation, which called for the former Archbishop's dismissal.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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