

Togo (69)



29/9-04

Togo

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 21,925 square miles and its population is estimated officially at 4,970,000. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2000, state that the population is approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consists of various Christian (9.8 percent) and non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and persons not affiliated with any religious group (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continue to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but is estimated to be small.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions of the country. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mostly in the southern regions.

Missionaries are active in the country and represent Assembly of God, Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, and Muslim groups.

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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and three Islamic holidays as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and End of Ramadan.

The Government has registration requirements for recognition of religious organizations. Officially recognized religious groups that conduct humanitarian and development projects receive tax benefits on imports, but have to request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Applications for registration must be submitted to the Ministry of Interior's Division of Civil Administration. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site plan, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

The Government did not reject the application of any religious group, but asked some organizations to resubmit their applications when their files were incomplete. At times, if an application provided insufficient information, the application remained open indefinitely. Members of groups that were not officially recognized could practice their religion but did not have legal standing.

The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization. For example, the Civil Security Division handles noise complaints made against religious organizations—particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Interior sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government recognizes 111 religious groups of which most are smaller Protestant groups and some new Muslim groups. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations, and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years. For example, the Baptist Mission Hospital has been practicing in the country for more than 15 years but did not receive the Ministry of Interior's final authorization until 2001.

In 2003, 11 religious groups submitted applications to the Government requesting official recognition. The Muslim Union of Togo reports that since 1991, a total of 52 Islamic groups have registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Religious classes are not part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive funding from the Government.

There are at least seven radio stations affiliated with religious groups.

In January, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Protestant, issued a public invitation to Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders to attend the annual ecumenical prayer service commemorating the anniversary of his military takeover. Eyadema has invited these religious leaders to this "Day of National Liberation" service for at least 10 years. For the sixth consecutive year, the Catholic Church declined the invitation, stating that it is inappropriate to hold a worship service in a government building. In April, the Minister of Interior called for an ecumenical prayer service to bless political consultations between the country and the European Union. The Catholic Church declined to participate.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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." There are no other laws or statutes that specifically restrict religious freedoms. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in the local and national governments.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, and those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block off city streets. The requests were granted routinely during the period covered by this report.

Reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter-marriage between persons of different religions was common.

The Christian Council addressed 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 collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Unlike his predecessor, the current Archbishop of Lome's Catholic Church continued to refrain from delivering political sermons in praise of President Eyadema.

Since 2002 the Catholic Church Bishops' Conference has spoken on the need for credible, transparent elections, and has criticized the Government for amending the Constitution and electoral code, and manipulating the National Election Commission.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy organized many activities to inform the public about religious freedom in the United States, including sponsoring programs during International Education Week and Black History Month that featured discussions of religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The U.S. Embassy also hosted a dinner for Muslim leaders and distributed thousands of publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy made arrangements for the director of the country's primary Muslim radio and television station, Jabal'Nour al Islamia, to visit the United States on a Volunteer Visitors Program. The Ambassador was a featured speaker on Radio Jabal'Nour al Islamia during Ramadan where he discussed religious tolerance in the United States. The U.S. Embassy coordinated these activities in order to strengthen the Muslim community's understanding of religious tolerance in the United States.

Released on September 15, 2004

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35387pf.htm)

