

2013 Report on International Religious Freedom - Chad

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Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Although relations between Muslims and Christians were generally good, there were occasional tensions between the communities.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom with the government and religious leaders. The embassy continued outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.2 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2009 census, approximately 58 percent is Muslim, 18 percent Catholic, 16 percent Protestant, and the remainder practices indigenous religious beliefs or has no religious affiliation. Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity and/or indigenous religions. Religious distribution is becoming more mixed, especially in urban areas.

The majority of Muslims adheres to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A small minority of Muslims holds beliefs associated with Wahhabism or Salafism.

Slightly more than half of Christians are Roman Catholics, according to the Catholic Church. The majority of Protestants are evangelical Christians. Small numbers of Bahais and Jehovah's Witnesses are also present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The constitution provides for a secular state, equality of religions, and freedom of religious expression.

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating inter-communal conflict, reporting on religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom.

The government requires organized religious groups, not including indigenous groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. The process is routine and non-discriminatory. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

The government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits religious groups to operate private schools.

The independent High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) oversees Islamic religious activities, including Arabic language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums. In coordination with the president, the HCIA appoints the grand imam, who oversees each region's high imam and serves as head of the council. The grand imam has the authority, although he does not exercise it, to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and control activities of Muslim charities.

On November 6, the government signed a diplomatic accord with the Holy See to establish the Catholic Church of Chad as a legal entity, the same status granted to the HCIA. The agreement also outlines a legal framework for the government's collaboration with the Catholic Church.

Muslim and Christian leaders share a rotational position on the government board that oversees the distribution of oil revenues.

Government Practices

The president promoted religious tolerance through public statements. During speeches on the Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, the president called for Chadians to reject radical Islam. Leaders from the country's principal religious organizations uniformly supported the policies the president articulated.

The president laid the cornerstone for the construction of the first Catholic basilica in the country. The government is funding the construction of the new basilica as well as restoration of the Notre Dame Cathedral in N'Djamena.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

In October the Baptist Mid-Mission Church of Abeche reported to the prime minister the vandalizing and desecration of its place of worship. Some church members reportedly received physical threats. Local authorities and the High Council for Islamic Affairs continued to investigate the issue as of the end of the year.

There were occasional tensions between Christians and Muslims on the community level; because ethnicity and religion are closely linked, it was difficult to distinguish between religious and ethnic tension.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other's ceremonies and celebrations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious tolerance through diplomatic engagement and outreach. The Ambassador and embassy officials met frequently with the grand imam and high council, and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom.

The embassy also supported visits, workshops, and cultural programs promoting tolerance and interfaith dialogue. The embassy provided an \$88,000 grant to the Salam Institute to educate imams on religious tolerance, train Quranic schoolteachers on civic education, and host interfaith seminars for members of Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups. A separate U.S. assistance program trained clerics and broadcasters in religious tolerance and respect for human rights, and provided equipment and programmatic content to the media in support of these themes.

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