

2013 Report on International Religious Freedom - Ghana

Publisher [United States Department of State](#)

Publication Date 28 July 2014

Cite as United States Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom - Ghana*, 28 July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53d9077314.html> [accessed 29 October 2014]

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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 discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Instructors at some public schools allegedly discriminated against students based on their Islamic faith.

U.S. embassy staff discussed religious freedom with the government and a wide range of non-governmental actors. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy organized and sponsored an exchange program and events to promote greater tolerance and mutual understanding.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 25.2 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent identifies as belonging to other religious groups or has no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations 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 (Quaker), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Islamic traditions include Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and a small number of Shia.

Many individuals who self-identify as Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs. There are also syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of Muslims reside in northern areas and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs reside in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the office of the registrar general in the justice ministry to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for other nongovernmental organizations. Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

Registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income. However, religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on business activities that generate income.

The education ministry includes religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. These courses incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity. There is also an Islamic education unit within the ministry responsible for coordinating all secular public education activities for Islamic communities.

Government Practices

The government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. Government meetings, receptions, and state funerals used both Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. Throughout the year, the president and vice president made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence.

In August President Mahama attended and made remarks at a national Eid-al-Fitr celebration in Accra. In his comments to the largely Muslim audience, including Ghana's National Chief Imam, President Mahama commended the Islamic community for peacefully co-existing with other religious groups and called on Ghanaians of all faiths to work together and show religious tolerance towards one another.

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice was responsible for monitoring, inspecting, and reporting on the conditions of prayer camps throughout the country, especially in

areas where there were reports of abusive treatment of camp residents, although it did not conduct any monitoring visits during the year. Spiritual healers operated the camps, which some communities used as treatment facilities for individuals with physical and mental illnesses, and for others considered societal outcasts.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

Throughout the year, especially prior to the August 29 Supreme Court verdict on the outcome of the 2012 presidential election, prominent religious leaders called publicly for citizens of all faiths to remain tolerant of different political and religious groups.

There were reports that some teachers in public secondary schools in the Western, Eastern, and Central Regions discriminated against Muslim students by requiring them to attend Christian church services and participate in Christian prayers as part of their education.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially for marginalized segments of the population.

The Ambassador and embassy staff met with religious leaders, including representatives from Islamic civil society organizations and Christian groups. In all meetings, embassy officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and tolerance.

Five U.S. high school students spent one year living with Ghanaian Muslim families as part of a U.S. government-funded program. The students participated in programs and activities promoting interfaith dialogue.

In October the Ambassador met with Ghana's National Chief Imam in honor of the Eid-al-Adha holiday. At the meeting, which other embassy and chief imam office officials attended, the Ambassador noted the important role the imam played in ensuring a peaceful public reaction to the August 29 Supreme Court verdict on the outcome of the 2012 presidential election.
