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## 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Ghana

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
July 30, 2012

*[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]*

### Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

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

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially marginalized groups.

### Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 16 percent is Muslim, 8 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 7 percent identifies as belonging to other religious groups, including those who profess no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include those adhering to the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian groups 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.

Several Islamic traditions are present in the country: orthodox Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and a small number of Shia.

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

There is not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population resides in northern areas as well as in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs resides 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 protect religious freedom.

There is no government body that regulates religious affairs, as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Office of the Registrar General within the Ministry of Justice/Attorney General's Office to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations. Most indigenous religious groups have not registered with the Office of the Registrar General.

The government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical,

charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income.

The Ministry of Education includes religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. These courses incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity to encourage students to adopt sound morals and values. There is also an Islamic Education Unit (IEU) within the Ghana Education Service responsible for coordinating all secular public education activities for Muslim communities.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

### *Government Practices*

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Despite the fact that all religious groups are required to register with the government, there were no reports that the government denied registration to any group.

The government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, Christian and Muslim prayers were recited; occasionally there were traditional invocations. Throughout the year, the president and vice president made public remarks regarding the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. In November President Mills inaugurated the National Peace Council under the Ministry of the Interior. The thirteen-member board was comprised of representatives mostly from religious bodies, as mandated by the 2011 National Peace Council Act. Its mandate is to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict in Ghana.

The government, specifically the Ministry of Women and Children, campaigns alongside NGOs to fight against the practice of banishing individuals believed to be warlocks or witches. This effort includes using existing anti-defamatory laws to prosecute individuals who accuse others of being witches. In its 2011 report the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) noted that suspected witches in the Gambaga, Kukuo, Kpatinga and the Ngaani camps in the Northern Region were concerned about reintegrating with their communities due to fears about their personal safety.

Government agencies such as CHRAJ campaigned against Trokosi, a practice of pledging youth (commonly young girls) to extended service at traditional shrines.

The government monitored the conditions of "prayer camps" throughout the country, especially in areas where abuse was reported. The camps are run by self-professed prophets and spiritual healers and are used as treatment facilities for individuals with physical and mental illnesses and other societal outcasts. This practice is especially prevalent in rural communities, where many families have few options for obtaining appropriate care.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

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

Traditional village authorities and families continued to banish rural women, often older women and widows, for the alleged practice of witchcraft. Fellow villagers identified these women as the cause of misfortunes such as illness, crop failure, and financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps" in villages in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions that were populated by suspected witches. The women did not face formal legal sanctions if they returned home; however, most feared they would be beaten or killed if they returned to their villages or attempted to pursue legal action to challenge the charges against them.

Abuses were reported at "prayer camps" where persons, often with mental illness, were chained for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water in an attempt to remove evil spirits. Reports indicated that these practices extended to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, Volta, and Brong Ahafo regions.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government and a broad range of other actors as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially the marginalized.