



2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - Burkina Faso

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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. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. The government organized a National Forum on Secularism, designed to foster religious tolerance and discuss the role of religion in a secular state.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy held several events during the year to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The government estimates the population at 16.8 million. Approximately 61 percent is Muslim, the majority Sunni. Approximately 19 percent is Roman Catholic, 4 percent belongs to various Protestant groups, and 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Muslims and Christians often adhere simultaneously to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians live in the center of the country. Persons practice indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. The capital has a mixed Muslim and Christian population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provide the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The country is a secular state.

The government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. The registration process usually takes about three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA (\$108). Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. Failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA (\$108 to \$325).

Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. The security ministry has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group.

The government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools and some tertiary schools. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The government does not fund religious schools, nor does it require them to pay taxes unless they conduct for-profit activities. The government reviews the curricula of religious schools to ensure they offer the full standard academic curriculum.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications.

Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures; however, bureaucratic procedures were equally onerous for all groups.

The government organized a highly-publicized two-day National Forum on Secularism, designed to foster religious tolerance and discuss the role of religion in a secular state. The 130 participants included government officials, representatives of religious and traditional communities, and civil society leaders. Participants submitted recommendations to the government for review, including a request to establish a forum on religious tolerance as a periodic consultation structure among representatives of the main religious groups. Other recommendations included introducing concepts

of secularism and religious tolerance in schools, and consolidating inter-religious dialogue and communication among representatives of the government, religious groups, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy held several events and funded two projects during the year to promote religious freedom.

The embassy hosted a multi-faith iftar in August with Muslim clerics, civil society leaders, and journalists in an effort to promote religious tolerance.

In August the embassy held a "Speed Conference" using Internet resources to explore issues of religion in modern life. More than 75 participants from various Catholic churches and mosques in Ouagadougou participated.