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2010 Report on International Religious Freedom - Cameroon

[Covers the period from July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010]

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 183,568 square miles and a population of 19.4 million. Approximately 69.2 percent of the population is Christian and 20.9 percent Muslim. Of the remaining population, 5.6 percent are animists, 3.3 percent do not associate themselves with any particular religious movement, and one percent practice other religions. The Christian population is divided between Roman Catholics (38.4 percent of the total population), Protestants (26.3 percent), Orthodox (0.5 percent), and other Christian denominations (four percent).

Muslims and Christians are found in every region, although Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western regions. Large cities have significant populations

of both groups. The two Anglophone provinces of the western region are largely Protestant, and the Francophone regions of the southern and western regions are mostly Catholic. In the northern regions, the locally dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mainly Muslim, but the overall population is fairly evenly divided among Muslims, Christians, and followers of indigenous religious beliefs. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Region is mostly Muslim. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced in rural areas throughout the country but are rarely practiced publicly in cities, in part because many of these beliefs are intrinsically local in character.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. It recognizes the right of individuals to choose and change their religion. The government observes and enforces the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and any citizen has the right to sue the government for the violation of any constitutionally protected freedom.

The law does not restrict religious publishing or other religious media. The Catholic Church operated two of the few modern private printing presses and published a weekly newspaper, *L'Effort Camerounais*. These private printing presses also printed several privately held secular newspapers. The state-sponsored television station and radio stations broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services on a regular basis, as well as religious ceremonies on national holidays and during national events.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Feast of the Lamb, and Christmas.

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the government and religious groups. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) must approve and register religious groups for them to function legally. It was illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition; however, the law prescribed no specific penalties for violations, and numerous unregistered small religious groups operated freely.

In order to register, a religious denomination must legally qualify as a religious congregation. The definition included "any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship" or "any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine." The denomination then submits a file to MINATD. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter

describing planned activities, and the names and functions of the group's officials. The minister reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. The president generally followed the recommendation of the minister and granted authorization by a presidential decree. Although official recognition conferred no general tax benefits, it allowed religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts for the conduct of their activities.

The government did not register indigenous religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion was a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

MINATD, rather than the judiciary, primarily resolved disputes between or within registered religious groups over control of places of worship, schools, other real estate or financial assets.

Several religious denominations operated primary and secondary schools. The law charged the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education with ensuring that private schools run by religious groups met the same standards as state-operated schools in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training. The government gave an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including those operated by religious denominations. There were also several religious universities in the country.

The practice of witchcraft, defined as any act of magic or divination liable to harm another person or property, was a criminal offense under the national penal code. The government distinguished between witchcraft and indigenous religious practice, and there were no cases of witchcraft trials that impinged upon indigenous religious belief.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

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.

Witchcraft trials were rare but conformed to the penal code. There were no reports of cases of persons accused of witchcraft for practicing his or her traditional religious beliefs.

Christians and Muslims organized ecumenical ceremonies to pray and promote a spirit of tolerance and peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.