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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Ghana

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

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

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

There were some 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 92,098 square miles and a population of 24 million. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 16 percent is Muslim, 8 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 7 percent is classified as belonging to other religious groups, which includes those who profess no religious beliefs. Some members of the Muslim community disputed these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is substantially larger. Many persons who are nominally Christian or Muslim also practiced some aspects of indigenous beliefs.

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 (Quakers), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

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

Indigenous religious groups include the Afrikania Mission. Other religious groups include the Bahai, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Shintoist, Ninchiren Shoshu, Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarian. 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 resided 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 indigenous religious beliefs resided in rural areas. Christians lived throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

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

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 to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations. There were no reports that the government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register.

The government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions were exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that did not generate income; however, religious organizations were required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generated income.

The Ministry of Education included religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum.

The government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, Christian and Muslim prayers were recited; occasionally there were indigenous invocations. Throughout the reporting period, the president and vice president made public remarks regarding the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. In March, President Mills declared a National Prayer and Thanksgiving Day for Muslims, Christians, and traditional believers.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Action Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

On November 20, in Tema, Greater Accra Region, persons including an evangelical pastor allegedly accused a 72-year-old woman of being a witch and set her on fire. The woman died the following day as a result of her injuries. Police arrested six persons, two of whom were charged with murder and remained in prison; the other four suspects were granted bail. At year's end the trial continued.

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 difficulties such as illness, crop failure, and financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps," 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. During 2010, the government agency Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) monitored three camps in the Northern Region for persons suspected of witchcraft.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus indigenous practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Some religious leaders actively advocated tolerance toward other religious groups and discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, and harassment; others, particularly laypersons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other groups such as Muslims and indigenous religious groups.

Some Muslims expressed a sense of political and social exclusion, citing token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, the preponderance of Christian prayers in public settings, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans as examples. However, the Mills administration appointed several Muslim ministers, and all the major political parties campaigned actively in Muslim communities during the 2008 electoral season.

Government agencies, such as CHRAJ, campaigned against Trokosi, a practice in the Volta region of pledging youth (commonly young females) to extended service at indigenous shrines.

Human rights abuses occurred 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. The lack of mental health care facilities in the country, especially in rural communities, left many families with few options for obtaining appropriate care.

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.

The ambassador and other embassy personnel met regularly with religious leaders and hosted or attended events with religious leaders throughout the reporting period. The ambassador held an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) during the Eid al-Fitr in September for selected students and orphans from lower-income Muslim communities. The embassy held the event in cooperation with the Islamic Education Unit (IEU), an agency within the Ministry of Education responsible for coordinating all secular education activities for Muslim communities in the country.

In June, the Office of Security Cooperation constructed a facility for the IEU in the Greater Accra region. The IEU oversees 1,615 schools, 225,000 students, and 8,300 teachers and staff, and it offers Arabic and Islamic classes in addition to the full government curriculum.

In August the embassy held a predeparture orientation for 35 participants in the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program; 16 of the participants were Muslim. The YES program targets underprivileged youth, particularly those in the Muslim community, and provides the opportunity to study for a year in a U.S. high school and live with a host family. The embassy also supported 42 students from 20 schools in the country's Muslim-dominated northern region to participate in the Scripps Spelling Bee Regional Finals on November 17. More than 25 percent of the participants were Muslim.

USAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Presidential Malaria Initiative launched a program to promote malaria prevention and treatment with faith-based organizations from Christian, Muslim, and charismatic communities. The Christian Council of Ghana, an organization of Christian churches, led the implementation of the program. In October 2010, USAID coordinated an event at which Christian and Muslim leaders from 21 religious groups jointly declared their commitment to promote malaria control through their member churches and mosques. USAID provided training and materials to spread malaria control messages at religious gatherings and group activities throughout the country.

On November 24, representatives from the embassy hosted a delegation from the Office of the National Chief Imam to discuss U.S. outreach to Muslim communities and identify opportunities for further engagement.

In December the U.S. government completed a two-year, \$105,072 project supporting the IEU's Performance Enhancement Program, which targeted low-achieving students at IEU schools throughout the Greater Accra region. In addition to tripling student pass rate of Basic Education Certificate Examinations, there were improvements in school supervision, teacher performance, community engagement, and the availability of teaching and learning materials.
