

IRF-TOGO REPORT

Togo

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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 21,925 square miles and a population of 6.3 million. The Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004 estimated the population to be 33 percent traditional animist, 28 percent Roman Catholic, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, 10 percent Protestant, and 10 percent Christians of other denominations. The remaining 5 percent includes persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many converts to the more widespread religious groups continue to perform rituals that originated in indigenous religious groups.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mainly in the south.

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. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution explicitly prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion, ethnic group, or region.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Tabaski, and Christmas.

The Government recognizes three main religious groups as state religions: Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. The Government requires other religious groups to register as associations. Official recognition as an association affords a group the same rights as the state religions. Officially recognized religious groups can receive import duty benefits for humanitarian and development projects but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Organizations must submit applications for registration to the Office of Political and Civil Organizations Affairs in the Ministry of Territorial Administration. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the group leader's diploma, a site use agreement, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. Criteria for recognition

include the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Office of Political and Civil Organizations Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigation and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

Unlike during previous reporting periods, the Government did not reject the applications of any religious groups.

The High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication, the commission that monitors the media, prohibits political discussions on religious radio and television stations.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block city streets. Officials routinely grant these requests. The Civil Security Division handles complaints associated with a religious organization, particularly noise complaints related to celebrations at night. The Ministry of Security sends security forces to address complaints.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum in public schools. However, Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are numerous, and the Government provides them with teachers and staff personnel and pays their salaries.

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, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

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.

Members of different religious groups regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies.

Intermarriage between persons of different religious groups was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among various Protestant denominations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

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 U.S. Embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious diversity, values, and culture in the United States. The Embassy distributed publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy included religious leaders, particularly Muslim leaders, in the International Visitors Program and continued an English language program that contained segments about religious pluralism in the United States.