

EQUATORIAL GUINEA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

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

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

U.S. embassy representatives met with the government and religious leaders to discuss support for religious freedom. These discussions focused on the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 700,000 (July 2013 estimate). An estimated 93 percent of the population is Christian, of which 87 percent is Roman Catholic and 6 percent belongs to Protestant and other denominations. Many Catholics reportedly adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs as well. Five percent of the population adheres exclusively to indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims, Bahais, and members of other religious groups each constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The number of Muslims is increasing due to the growing number of West African and Middle Eastern immigrants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The law establishes religious freedom and outlines the procedures for registering a religious group with the government. A presidential decree provides additional regulations, including official preference for the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea.

The presidential decree regulates registration of religious groups. Religious groups must submit a written application to the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs, and

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Penitentiary Institutions. The ministry's director general oversees compliance with the decree and the registration process. The Catholic and Reformed churches are not required to register. Unregistered groups can be fined. Religious groups must obtain permission for any activities outside of places of worship.

The law states that each person is free to study his or her religion and may not be forced to study another faith. Religious study is optional in public schools and can be replaced by a course in social or civic education.

Government Practices

Government practice demonstrated a preference for the Catholic and Reformed Churches. Catholic masses were a normal part of all major ceremonial functions, such as the October 12 National Day and the President's Birthday June 5. Catholic leaders occasionally had public meetings with government officials, the only religious leaders to do so.

The application and approval process for registration sometimes took several years, but delays were reportedly due to bureaucratic inefficiency rather than policy. The government more rapidly approved applications by groups providing beneficial social programs, such as health projects or schools. The government enforced registration requirements inconsistently. The government rarely levied fines but periodically announced that unregistered religious groups were subject to fines or closure and should register as soon as possible.

Although the government required that religious groups obtain permission for any activities outside of places of worship, in practice this did not prevent religious groups from holding retreats and other meetings. Door-to-door proselytism occurred without incident.

Protestant groups, including the Reformed Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Baptists, and evangelical groups, continued to operate primary and secondary schools without government hindrance.

Some non-Catholic clergy, who also worked for the government as civil servants, continued to report that their supervisors strongly encouraged participation in religious activities related to their government positions, including attending Catholic masses.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with religious leaders and government officials to discuss religious freedom. The Ambassador met with several religious leaders, including bishops of the Catholic Church, the heads of several Protestant congregations, and Muslim leaders to discuss the need to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups, especially for minority religious groups.