

# **SENEGAL 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for the free practice of religious beliefs and self-governance by religious groups without government interference. There were no reports of government actions affecting these constitutional guarantees.

There were no significant societal developments affecting religious freedom.

Through active engagement with religious leaders, religious groups, government, and civil society, and sponsorship of a visit by a Chicago Muslim community leader, the U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials promoted religious pluralism and dialogue.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.6 million (July 2014 estimate). Approximately 94 percent of the population is Muslim. Most Muslims belong to one of several Sufi brotherhoods, each of which incorporates unique practices that reflect Islam's long history in the country. Some Muslims affiliate with Sunni or Shia reform movements. Approximately 5 percent of the population is Christian. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and groups combining Christian and indigenous beliefs. The remaining 1 percent exclusively adheres to indigenous religions or professes no religion.

Although there is significant integration of all groups, Muslims are generally concentrated in the north while Christians largely reside in the west and south. Members of indigenous religious groups mainly live in the east and south.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution specifically defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided public order is maintained, as well as self-governance by religious groups, free from state interference. The constitution prohibits political parties from identifying with a specific religion.

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Muslims may choose either the civil family code or sharia to adjudicate family conflicts, such as marriage and inheritance disputes. Civil court judges preside over civil and customary law cases, but religious leaders informally settle many disputes among Muslims, particularly in rural areas.

By law all groups, religious or otherwise, must register with the interior ministry to acquire legal status as an association. To register, groups must provide documentation showing they have worked for at least two years as an association. Groups must also provide a mission statement, bylaws, a list of goals, objectives, and activities or projects implemented, and proof of previous and future funding. They must also pass a background check. Registration enables a group to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, receive financial contributions from private sources, and receive applicable tax exemptions. There is no formal penalty for failure to register other than ineligibility to receive these benefits. Registered religious groups and nonprofit organizations are exempt from many forms of taxation.

In addition, the law requires domestic associations, including religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with them, to obtain authorization to operate from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Development. Foreign NGOs must obtain authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **Government Practices**

The government provided direct financial and material assistance to religious groups, primarily to maintain or rehabilitate places of worship or to underwrite special events. There was no formal procedure for applying for assistance. All religious groups had access to these funds and often competed on an ad hoc basis to obtain them.

The government encouraged and assisted Muslim participation in the annual Hajj, providing imams with hundreds of free airplane tickets for the pilgrimage for distribution among citizens. The government provided similar assistance for an annual Roman Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican, the Palestinian territories, and Israel.

The government allowed up to four hours of voluntary religious education per week in public elementary schools. Parents could choose either a Christian or

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Muslim curriculum. Students had the option to opt out of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education reported slightly more than a million students participated in religious education through the public elementary school system.

The education ministry provided partial funding to schools operated by religious groups that met national education standards. Established Christian schools with strong academic reputations received the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools were Muslim. The government also funded a number of Islamic schools in which approximately 60,000 students were enrolled.

The Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Women, Family and Social Development monitored domestic associations, including religious groups and NGOs affiliated with them, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitored foreign-based NGOs, including those affiliated with religious groups. The ministries required the submission of an annual report, including a financial report.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

Through active engagement with religious leaders, including leaders of the main Islamic brotherhoods, religious groups, government, and civil society, the U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials promoted and helped facilitate freedom of religion and societal respect for religious freedom.

The Ambassador also hosted an iftar that brought together major Muslim leaders, leaders of grassroots Islamic organizations, and government officials responsible for religious issues for a discussion of the importance of interfaith friendship and religious freedom.

The embassy sponsored a well-known U.S. citizen and Muslim community leader from Chicago to visit Dakar during Ramadan to speak to several audiences, including members of the embassy's information research center, students and faculty at the national Islamic Institute, students at a Muslim college, leaders of one of Senegal's Muslim brotherhoods, and musicians at a community center. His approach emphasized the use of music to advance intercultural understanding and

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showed how community service expresses the individual's faith through action. The embassy also arranged a number of press opportunities for the speaker to address a wider national audience through the media.