

TOGO 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution specifies the state is secular and protects the rights of all citizens to exercise their religious beliefs, consistent with the nation's laws. Religious groups, other than Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, must register with the government in a protracted procedure that includes providing the religious credentials of leadership, financial information, and plans for religious facilities and satisfying the government's ethical criteria. Several religious groups applied for registration, but the government had not approved any applications by year's end. The government was considering a new law regulating worship practices, including means of addressing disputes between religious groups, and solicited input on the legislation from representatives of 11 religious federations.

There were occasional disputes among religious groups, frequently related to noise caused by religious celebrations, or competition for parishioners between churches. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage was common.

The U.S. embassy met regularly with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom, and the Ambassador hosted a dinner in July for leaders from different religious groups and government officials, where he discussed interfaith respect and religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.4 million (July 2014 estimate). According to a 2004 estimate by the University of Lome, the population is 33 percent traditional animist, 28 percent Roman Catholic, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, 10 percent Protestant, and 10 percent other Christian denominations. The remaining 5 percent includes persons not affiliated with any religious group. Protestant groups include Methodists and Lutherans. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious practices. Reliable figures are difficult to obtain due to migration and because the government does not collect religious and ethnic data.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions. Christians live mainly in the southern part of the country. The Muslim Union of Togo reports a large surge

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in immigrants from Muslim countries every year, but the government does not collect the statistics that would verify such reports.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the nation is a secular state and ensures equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of religion, respects all religious beliefs, and prohibits religious discrimination. It provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship, the free exercise of religious belief, and the right of religious groups to organize themselves and carry out their activities consistent with the law.

The law recognizes Catholicism, Protestantism (including Methodism and Lutheranism), and Islam as state religions. It requires all other religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Official recognition as a religious association affords these groups the same rights as those afforded to the three state religions, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Unregistered groups may face obstacles such as obtaining building permits for places of worship.

Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MTA). A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, the group leader's religious credentials, a site use agreement and map for religious facilities, and description of the group's finances. Criteria for recognition include the authenticity of the religious leader's diploma and the government's assessment of the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Directorate of Religious Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition for religious groups and associations applying for registration. The investigation and issuance of formal written authorization usually takes several years.

By law religious groups must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those likely to block city streets or involve loud ceremonies in residential areas. Officials routinely grant these requests. The MTA handles complaints associated with religious organizations, particularly noise complaints from nighttime celebrations, and sends security force personnel to resolve issues.

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The public school curriculum does not include religion classes. There are, however, many Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools, to which the government assigns its own paid employees as additional teachers and staff. Other religious groups have the right to establish schools, as long as they meet accreditation standards.

The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. Private religious radio stations are forbidden from airing political broadcasts.

Government Practices

According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, two religious groups registered during the year, and the applications of approximately 40 others were in suspense pending further information from the groups requesting registration. Applicants were able to continue their religious activities while awaiting registration.

In August the minister of territorial affairs met with the leaders of 11 religious federations, including Christians, Muslims, and animists, to solicit input on the regulation of worship practices. This included means of regulating disputes between groups over issues including noise from religious ceremonies, such as from drumming late at night, as well as competition between congregations over parishioners. The minister asked the federations to make suggestions that could provide the basis of a proposed law. By year's end the ministry had received no feedback.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

A dispute arose in Lome between a Pentecostal church and a recently-arrived parish linked to a church in Nigeria when the existing Pentecostal church complained that the new parish worshipped too loudly. The MTA proposed the competing churches perform their activities at different times, but this failed to resolve the dispute. The dispute remained unresolved at year's end.

Members of different religious groups regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Marriage between persons of different religious groups was common.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, and traditional chiefs. On July 24, the Ambassador hosted religious leaders from Lome's Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities, government officials, including the minister of security and civil protection, and other civil society representatives at an interfaith dinner. The event was designed in part to promote respect and good relations among the country's various religious groups.