

GHANA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice their religion. Registration is required for religious groups to have legal status. Female Muslim secondary school students reported that testing officials from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) ordered them to remove their hijab and/or veil before they could take a standardized examination, but WAEC officials subsequently took corrective action.

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

The U.S. embassy engaged with government officials to emphasize the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders and community organizations and sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. In September the embassy hosted an American Muslim scholar and interfaith advocate who discussed with religious leaders and youth the importance of cooperation between Islamic groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 26.3 million (July 2015 estimate). Approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent identifies as belonging to other religious groups or having no religious beliefs. Other religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Eden Revival Church International, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quaker), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Islamic traditions include Sunni, Ahmadiyya, the Tijaniyah and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and a small number of Shia.

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Many individuals who self-identify as Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of indigenous beliefs. There are also syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. Christians live throughout the country; the majority of Muslims resides in the northern regions and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa; and the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs resides in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice any religion and manifest such practice. These rights may be limited for stipulated reasons, which include “restrictions that are reasonably required in the interest of defense, public safety, public health or the running of essential services, on the movement or residence within Ghana of any person or persons generally, or any class of persons.”

Religious groups must register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for other nongovernmental organizations. In order to register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee. Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

According to the law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities.

The education ministry includes compulsory religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. There is no provision to opt out of these courses, which incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity. There is also an Islamic education unit within the ministry responsible for coordinating all public education activities for Islamic communities. Private religious and

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nonreligious schools are permitted; however, they must follow the prescribed curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. International schools are exempt from these requirements.

Government Practices

In January female Muslim secondary school students reported that testing officials from the WAEC ordered them to remove their hijab and/or veil before they could take the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Within days of the report, the Ghana National Office of the WAEC publicly stated that testing officials only needed to identify students before allowing them to take the WASSCE, and that proper identification did not necessarily require removal of a hijab or veil. Students were required to pose for passport-sized photos for WASSCE registration purposes, but the WAEC officials stated that removal of any head or face covering would not be required if key facial features were visible in the photograph.

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice continued to monitor, inspect, and report on the conditions of prayer camps throughout the country, which some communities used as treatment facilities for individuals with physical and mental illnesses and other societal outcasts. The Mental Health Authority continued a pilot program that placed psychiatric nurses in prayer camps to give medication to patients.

Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations were used at government meetings, receptions, and state funerals. The president and vice president continued to make public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence.

The government initiated a “Worship in Schools” program intended to be a class on moral and social education. Some religious groups said the program became a pretext for promoting the religious leanings of the respective teacher. Teachers punished and sometimes beat students who refused to participate. After several complaints, the government discontinued the program in September.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed with government officials the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy also discussed these subjects with a broad range of other actors, including Islamic civil society organizations and Christian groups.

In June the Ambassador met with the national chief imam and others from his office in honor of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. The Ambassador and the national chief imam noted the important role interfaith dialogue played in promoting peaceful coexistence among religions and highlighted the need to speak out against extremism.

In July the Charge d’Affaires hosted an iftar that included religious leaders from various faiths. The event highlighted religious tolerance as well as universal values shared by all faiths such as peace, justice, charity, family, and community.

In September the embassy hosted an American Muslim scholar and interfaith advocate. During the visit to Accra and Tamale, the embassy arranged meetings with a range of individuals — from religious clerics to youth leaders — to discuss the importance of religious tolerance as it pertains to education, women’s empowerment, and cooperation between Islamic groups.