

TOGO 2018 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. After unknown assailants vandalized four mosques in July and August in Lome, the government denounced the attacks and called for solidarity with the Muslim community. The government subsequently posted security forces to guard mosques throughout the country and promised to conduct investigations to find the perpetrators and prosecute them. The government again did not approve any pending registration applications from religious groups, nor did it accept new applications; approximately 900 remained pending at year's end. The Ministry of Territorial Affairs (MTA) continued to organize meetings with religious leaders and communities to discuss pending draft legislation regarding religious freedom that would delineate procedures on registering religious associations and federations.

Leaders of different religious groups and civil society organizations condemned the July and August mosque attacks. Noise caused by religious celebrations or competition for parishioners among churches caused occasional disputes among religious groups. The Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA reported approximately 50 complaints, almost all regarding noise in Lome, received during the year. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common.

U.S. embassy officials met with the government officials and discussed the importance of finding the perpetrators of the mosque attacks. Embassy officers also met with religious leaders throughout the year and discussed the latter's efforts to reduce tensions in communities related to the political crisis during the year. The embassy launched a program during the year to enhance social cohesion among youth of different religious backgrounds and to promote the use of peaceful methods to resolve disputes.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.2 million (July 2018 estimate). According to a 2009 estimate by the University of Lome, the most recent data available, the population is 43.7 percent Christian, 35.6 percent

traditional animist, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, and 5 percent followers of other religions. Roman Catholics are the largest Christian group at 28 percent of the total population, followed by Protestants at 10 percent, and other Christian denominations totaling 5.7 percent. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. Other Christians include members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The 5 percent representing “other religions” includes Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Baha’is, Hindus, and persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious practices.

Christians live mainly in the south, while Muslims are predominately in the central and northern regions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

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

The law requires all religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations, except for Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim holidays are observed as national holidays. Official recognition as a religious association provides other groups the same rights as those afforded to Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registering is not obligatory, but registration entitles religious groups to receive government benefits, such as government-provided teachers for private schools and special assistance in case of natural disasters.

Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA. A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names, and addresses of executive board members, its leaders’ religious credentials, a site use agreement and map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$260).

Criteria for recognition include 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 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.

The public school curriculum does not include religion classes. There are many Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools, to which the government assigns its own paid employees as additional teachers and staff. Other registered 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. The law forbids private religious radio stations from broadcasting political material.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Unknown assailants vandalized four mosques in July and August in different neighborhoods in Lome. The minister of security immediately denounced the attacks and called on the public to help find the perpetrators. The government subsequently posted security forces to guard mosques throughout the country and promised to conduct investigations to find the perpetrators and prosecute them in accordance with the country's laws. There were no further attacks after August; by year's end, the authorities had not identified the attackers.

Similar to previous years, the MTA stated it did not approve any pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because the government was still considering new legislation regarding religious freedom. The government amended a previous draft religious freedom bill during the year and submitted it to the Council of Ministers for review. The new bill details the processes for opening places of worship and regulates the hours of operation and levels of noise allowed during worship in neighborhoods. The MTA continued to organize meetings with religious leaders and communities to discuss

the draft legislation, with the last meeting held in August. As of year's end, there were approximately 900 applications pending at the MTA.

Although unregistered religious groups continued to be able to conduct religious activities while awaiting registration, the MTA reported that religious groups faced obstacles in obtaining building permits to construct new places of worship. The ministry continued to state, however, this was not because they were religious groups but because applying for a building permit required at least a six-month waiting period for any applicant. NGOs reported that officials routinely granted religious groups' requests for permission to conduct nighttime celebrations.

The government invited only Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders to government events and observed as national holidays only religious holidays of these groups. The government invited the three groups to conduct worship at important national events, such as the independence celebration on April 27.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA, disputes continued to occur when new churches established themselves in neighborhoods, particularly those led by religious leaders from Nigeria. Local residents continued to state some of these congregations worshiped too loudly and often late at night, using drums. The MTA received approximately 50 complaints during the year, nearly all regarding noise in Lome, and the ministry stated it sought to resolve them. Religious leaders noted that complaints reportedly often focused on evangelical Protestant congregations, led by charismatic leaders who presided over services employing musical instruments and loud praying.

Members of Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious groups continued to invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Marriage between persons of different religious groups remained common.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to discuss religious tolerance, methods of countering extremist messaging, and the importance of finding the perpetrators of the mosque attacks.

The ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, traditional chiefs, and civil society organizations.

The U.S. embassy launched a program to promote social cohesion among youth of different religious backgrounds implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the Muslim majority city of Sokode in November. The program aimed to teach participants to resolve differences peacefully. It follows a CRS-initiated project that brought together 115 religious leaders from various backgrounds to participate in a series of social cohesion workshops in March.