

TOGO 2019 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. 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 same as in previous years. According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) in the Ministry of Territorial Affairs (MTA), however, the government did not prevent these groups from opening new religious institutions and carrying out their activities informally. The DRA reported 44 complaints, almost all regarding noise in Lome, received during the year. The MTA suspended five churches due to failure to respond adequately to noise complaints. The MTA continued to organize meetings with religious leaders and communities to discuss key issues affecting their communities.

Noise caused by religious celebrations or competition for parishioners among churches caused occasional disputes among religious groups. There were no attacks on religious institutions during the year, in contrast with the previous year. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common. Leaders of different religious groups and civil society organizations noted continued positive relations across all religious groups present in the country.

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to discuss religious tolerance and methods of countering extremist messaging related to religion. Embassy officers met with religious leaders throughout the year and discussed their efforts to reduce tensions in communities and support peace and social cohesion in the aftermath of a 2017-18 political crisis that included widespread antigovernment protests. The embassy continued a program launched in 2018 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 8.4 million (midyear 2019 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. Other religious groups include Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Baha'is, and Hindus. There are also 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 for 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 Islamic 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 DRA. 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 DRA 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

Similar to previous years, the MTA stated it did not approve any pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups. As of year's end, there were approximately 900 applications pending at the MTA, the same as in previous years. The government suspended the application process in 2013 due to what it said were concerns about the proliferation of religious institutions and the lack of clear regulations to govern their conduct. As in 2018, according to MTA officials, the government was working on draft legislation that detailed regulations regarding religious groups. The MTA submitted its comments on the draft legislation in July and was waiting for the cabinet to adopt the bill and then for the National Assembly to pass it. The new bill details the process 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 key issues affecting their communities, such as noise levels and building locations.

Unregistered religious groups continued to be able to conduct religious activities while awaiting registration, according to the MTA. The MTA reported that unregistered 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. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that officials routinely granted religious groups' requests for permission to conduct nighttime celebrations.

The MTA reported it received 44 complaints during the year, nearly all regarding noise in Lome, and suspended five churches due to failure to respond adequately to noise complaints. Suspended churches were prohibited from holding worship services, but members could worship in other locations. To be reinstated, churches were required to work with the government to demonstrate they had addressed noise issues. The DRA said it conducted a two-year awareness campaign in 2017 and 2018 prior to initiating the suspensions related to noise levels and engaged in a comprehensive mediation process prior to suspending any churches. The mediation process included multiple rounds of dialogue between government representatives and church leaders that culminated in signed commitments by the religious institutions to reduce noise levels. If complaints continued after a religious organization negotiated and signed two noise reduction agreements, the DRA warned the group in writing that it risked suspension if it did not take appropriate action within one month and suspended organizations that did not comply. One religious NGO said it was concerned with the suspension of churches due to noise complaints and said it was not aware of any dialogue with church representatives or formal notification by the government prior to the five suspensions.

The DRA reported it prevented the construction of two mosques due to concerns about their proximity to residential areas and noise levels. The MTA also suspended one church for inadequate construction and safety standards after a wall collapsed.

As of year's end, authorities had not released any additional information or made any arrests related to the July and August 2018 vandalism by unknown assailants of four mosques in Lome. After the incidents, the government denounced the attacks, called on the public to help find the perpetrators, 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 law.

The government invited all federations of registered religious organizations to government events. The government observed Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim holidays as national holidays. The government also invited these three groups to conduct prayers at important national events, such as the independence celebration on April 27.

One NGO expressed concern about an increased police presence in Muslim-majority areas of Lome due to government concerns about opposition party political activism following countrywide protests against the government in 2017-18. Observers said supporters of one of the main opposition parties were predominately Muslim and participated in the antigovernment demonstrations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the DRA, disputes continued to occur when new churches established themselves in neighborhoods. Local residents continued to state some congregations worshiped too loudly and often late at night, using drums. The MTA noted that complaints reportedly often focused on evangelical Protestant congregations, led by charismatic leaders who presided over services employing musical instruments and loud praying. An NGO said the congregations of the churches suspended for noise violations did not believe their worship services were too loud.

There were no attacks on religious institutions during the year, in contrast with 2018.

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

Embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to urge the government to continue its open communication with religious leaders about religious tolerance and methods of countering extremist messaging related to religion.

The ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of interreligious communication and nonviolent dispute resolution practices with Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, traditional chiefs, and civil society organizations.

The embassy continued a program launched in 2018 to promote social cohesion and interfaith tolerance among youth of different religious backgrounds implemented by Catholic Relief Services in the Muslim majority city of Sokode. The program taught 100 young participants to resolve differences peacefully and contribute positively to their community, ultimately reaching approximately 3,000 persons indirectly through community activities and events.

The embassy also supported training for youth community leaders on developing messages of peace and religious tolerance in Dapaong, a city near the northern border with Burkina Faso. The training was part of a broader program in which the embassy worked with the government to create a committee to coordinate the efforts of religious and community leaders with security forces to combat violent extremism related to religion. Members of these groups established committees on the national, regional, and prefectural levels to facilitate joint efforts by communities and security forces to counter violent extremism.