

# CAMEROON 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits religious harassment, and provides for freedom of religion and worship. According to media reports and religious leaders, most abuses involving religious freedom occurred in the predominantly English-speaking Northwest and Southwest Regions, where violence associated with the separatist crisis continued. Because religion, ethnicity, and political ideology are closely linked, it was often difficult to determine whether incidents were predominantly motivated by religion. In August, gunmen killed a woman and wounded a pastor at a Protestant church in Bali, Northwest Region. The pastor said the gunmen were government soldiers, while the Ministry of Defense said separatists attacking a government patrol caused the casualties. In October, government forces accompanied by Muslim Mbororo herders killed at least seven residents and burned homes in the mostly Christian town of Wum, Northwest Region, according to multiple sources. The incident exacerbated preexisting tensions between the two religious communities, according to local residents. In June, security forces arrested a Catholic priest in Vekovi, Northwest Region, who had previously been captured and maintained in separatist custody more than once; security forces accused the priest of collaborating with separatists and detained him for four days before releasing him on bail. In multiple instances, government forces in search of separatists in the Northwest and Southwest Regions destroyed church buildings and clerical residences. On at least two occasions, security forces looking for separatists interrupted church services in Bui, Northwest Region and compelled the worshippers to leave. Multiple religious leaders said that their churches were targets in the fighting between security forces and separatists and underscored that the constant fighting discouraged parishioners from attending worship services. In April, the governor of Adamawa Region suspended night prayers at mosques during Ramadan to prevent the spread of COVID-19; some residents said this restricted their freedom of worship. Religious leaders expressed frustration with the government's continued failure to register new religious groups and said many requests were pending.

The U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) launched violent attacks against local communities, disrupted church activities, and abducted civilians, including Christian women and girls, whom they often sexually abused and forced into marriage with Muslim men. The media reported that ISIS-WA was strictly applying sharia in the areas of the

country around Lake Chad under its control. Suspected Boko Haram terrorists damaged at least one church building in Krawa-Mafa, Far North Region. In February, Muslim Mbororo herders in Nwa, Northwest Region killed 13 members of the mostly Christian settled population and burned three churches and the home of a local pastor reportedly in response to Christian attacks in the area against members of the Mbororo community. According to a pastor in the area, the separatist crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions had exacerbated tensions, especially as Mbororos regularly allied with the military against separatists. In June, media reported that separatists attacked priests at a Catholic pastoral center in Mamfe, Southwest Region, killing two individuals and wounding at least 11 others. Also, in Mamfe, separatists on two occasions abducted Catholic priests and released them after negotiations. A priest in Mamfe said a perception that the Catholic Church was wealthy made it a major target of some groups who regularly threatened and abducted priests for ransom. In one instance in Mamfe, the abductors said they had taken a priest as a warning to the Catholic Church, which they considered allied with the government and opposed to the independence of the Northwest and Southwest Regions. In October, gunmen abducted the congregational chairperson of a Protestant church in Bamenda; the national Protestant church organization said separatists carried out the abduction. In May, separatists in Kumbo, Northwest Region fired gunshots during a commemorative Catholic worship service. Pro-separatist media later reported that the separatists opposed the presence at the event of the Northwest Region governor and viewed his presence as evidence the Church was collaborating with the government.

In September, tensions escalated between Muslims and Christians in Ngaoundere, Adamawa Region when the leading imam in the area accused authorities at a Catholic high school of attempting to convert Muslim students by compelling them to wear badges bearing a cross on their school uniforms. After government-led mediation, both sides agreed that Muslim students at the school would be exempt from the requirement, but many Muslim parents withdrew their children from the school after the incident. The Catholic Archdiocese of Bamenda reported that unidentified individuals removed sacred items from two churches in Njinikom, Northwest Region during the year. Throughout the year, Muslim and Christian leaders initiated interfaith activities aimed at facilitating interreligious dialogue, promoting peaceful coexistence of different faiths, and seeking a peaceful resolution to the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions where separatists were seeking secession. Muslim and Christian leaders also collaborated with the government and international organizations to encourage their faith communities to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

In March and in October, embassy officials discussed interreligious tensions and terrorist attacks with government officials, including three mayors in the East and Adamawa Regions. In May, the embassy hosted a religious freedom roundtable with a diverse group of prominent religious leaders. In other engagements with Muslim and Christian leaders and civil society groups, embassy officials also discussed interreligious dialogue, communal tensions, and the views of Muslim leaders regarding Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks in the Far North Region. In discussions with leading figures from the main religious groups, embassy officers stressed the importance of interfaith dialogue and the role of religious leaders in the search for a peaceful solution to the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. In March, the embassy issued a press release condemning communal violence between Muslim Mbororos and the Christian community in Nwa and called for those responsible to be held accountable.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 28.5 million (midyear 2021). According to the 2005 census, the most recent available, 69.2 percent of the population is Christian, 20.9 percent Muslim, 5.6 percent animist, 1.0 percent belongs to other religions, and 3.2 percent reports no religious affiliation. Among Christians, 55.5 percent are Catholic, 38 percent Protestant, and 6.5 percent other Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Orthodox churches. The 2020 Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project found that 38.3 percent of Christians were Catholic and 31.4 percent of Christians were Protestant. There is a growing number of Christian revivalist churches.

Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The Northwest and Southwest Regions are largely Protestant, and the South, Center, East, Littoral, and West Regions are mostly Catholic. The Mbororo ethnic community is mostly Muslim and located primarily in the North, Far North, Northwest, Adamawa, and East Regions; the Bamoun ethnic group is also predominantly Muslim and located in the West Region. Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits harassment or discrimination on grounds of religion, and provides for freedom of religion.

The law on freedom of association governs relations between the government and religious groups. The government must approve religious groups or institutions as a prerequisite for lawful operation. Although the law prescribes no specific penalties for operating without official registration, the government may suspend the activities of unregistered groups. The government does not require indigenous religious groups to register, characterizing the practice of traditional religion as a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

To become a registered entity, a religious group must legally qualify as a religious congregation, defined as “any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship” or “any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine.” The entity must submit a request for registration as a religious group and include with it the group’s charter describing planned activities, names and functions of the group’s officials, and a declaration of commitment to comply with the law on freedom of association to the relevant local office. The relevant local office then forwards the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT).

MINAT reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. Registration is granted by presidential decree. Official registration confers no general tax benefits but allows religious groups to receive real estate as a tax-free gift for the conduct of activities and to gather publicly and worship. It also permits missionaries to receive visas with longer validity. Unregistered religious groups may gather publicly and worship under a policy of “administrative tolerance” as long as public security and peace are not disturbed.

MINAT may issue an order to suspend any religious group for “disturbing public order,” although no legislation defines these terms. The President may dissolve any previously authorized religious organization that “deviates from its initial focus.”

The Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education require private religious schools to comply with the same curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher-training standards as state-operated schools. Unlike public schools, private schools may offer religious education.

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

### **Government Practices**

Media and religious leaders said most abuses of religious freedom were related to the crisis involving English-speaking separatists in the Northwest and Southwest Regions and the activities of nonstate actors in the Far North Region. Because religion, ethnicity, and political ideology are closely linked, it was often difficult to determine whether incidents were predominantly motivated by religion.

According to the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), gunmen fired on the PCC church building in Natanfoang, Northwest Region during an August 22 service, killing a parishioner, Grace Titalabit, and wounding the officiating pastor, Simon Montoh Voma. After he recovered, Montoh Voma said that government soldiers had wounded him and killed Titalabit. According to the media, church parishioners at the time of the incident said that men in military uniforms fired the gunshots. PCC Moderator Samuel Forba Fonki condemned the shootings in an August 22 press release and called for an independent investigation. In a press release on August 23, the Ministry of Defense stated that members of the separatist group Buffalo Fighters of Bali detonated an improvised explosive device as soldiers on patrol approached the church and exchanged gunfire with separatist fighters. The ministry's statement blamed separatists for killing Titalabit and wounding Montoh Voma.

In October, government forces accompanied by local Muslim Mbororo herders killed at least seven individuals in the mostly Christian town of Wum, Northwest Region, according to multiple sources. The attackers burned one of the victims alive and burned 13 houses. The attacks occurred shortly after separatists killed a soldier in Wum. According to multiple Wum residents, the involvement of Muslim Mbororos in military campaigns against local populations, who are mostly Christian, significantly worsened traditionally tense relations between the two communities.

On June 8, government forces in Vekovi, Northwest Region arrested Father Sylvester Ngarba Nsah, a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Kumbo. Soldiers took him to a military tribunal in Bamenda, Northwest Region, where they accused him of collaborating with separatists and detained him for several days before releasing him on bail. The case against Ngarba Nsah remained pending at year's end.

On October 5, according to media and civil society sources, government forces looking for separatists destroyed part of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) church building in Luh, Northwest Region. According to the pastor of the church, the soldiers deliberately shot at the building multiple times, damaging the walls and destroying the windows. He said there were no casualties, as the church was empty at the time.

According to CBC Pastor Vincent Tawa, on October 6, government forces looking for separatists attacked church buildings in Kikaikum, Northwest Region. Tawa said the soldiers broke into the CBC church compound, destroyed the church residence, and invaded the Full Gospel church building, destroying church property inside.

According to Charles Mbuntum, a Catholic priest in Kikaikelaki, Northwest Region, on April 25, government soldiers on patrol interrupted a morning worship service and forced 20 civilians out of their church to fill trenches and remove separatist-established roadblocks. Mbuntum said the soldiers allowed them to rejoin the other worshippers after they cleared the road. According to the media, on July 5, government forces entered a church in Ngondzen during a worship service, accused the worshippers of supporting separatists, and forced them to exit the building.

According to a priest of the Diocese of Kumbo, on April 26, soldiers fighting separatists fired shots at the Catholic residence in Kikaikelaki, damaging the building. The priest said that intense gunfire exchanges between separatists and government forces often took place while he officiated morning worship services. He said the constant fighting frightened parishioners and had discouraged many from attending religious services.

On April 30, Adamawa Region Governor Kildadi Taguieke Boukar suspended night prayers at mosques to preempt a rise in COVID-19 cases due to the expected large number of worshippers during the final 10 days of Ramadan, when most did not follow government COVID-19 safety guidelines. According to local authorities, the governor consulted Muslim leaders, who relayed his message to their followers. However, some local residents complained the suspension of night prayers limited their freedom to worship during the most sacred period of the Islamic calendar.

On May 11, Minister of Territorial Administration Paul Atanga Nji banned the Cameroonian Lunar Crescent Council (CLCC) from making public announcements

on the duration of Ramadan and said only the National Lunar Crescent Commission (NLCC), another Muslim organization, had that right. Atanga Nji's ban followed a dispute between the newly created CLCC and the NLCC regarding the determination of the duration of Ramadan. The NLCC had played this role in previous years. Muslim leaders opposed to the CLCC's creation described the new organization as controversial in a press release. They said the CLCC lacked credibility and transparency and promoted discord among Muslims.

The government took no action to adjudicate applications for the registration of several religious groups that had been pending for years. The government approved only one new religious group in the last 18 years and none since 2010. Although by law groups must register, the government continued to allow hundreds of unregistered small religious groups to operate freely under a policy of "administrative tolerance." In June, approximately 50 Pentecostal churches that had been functioning in secret in Yaounde submitted their registration documents to the prefect of Yaounde I subdivision and expressed the desire to be recognized officially, according to a local media outlet. As of the end of the year, the churches in question remained unregistered. According to a local religious leader, the government was reluctant to register many faith-based organizations, such as Pentecostal churches, partly because they "lacked the ability to coordinate their actions and activities," unlike Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.

On October 26, an official of the government-sponsored Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC) said that in many instances, the government could not register faith-based organizations because of their inability to meet the legal criteria and present required documentation. According to the CHRC official, the government was also reluctant to recognize the existence of faith-based organizations it assessed had ulterior financial motives. Some religious group members continued to suggest the government used the delay in registrations to curb unregistered churches and to create tension between those with proper credentials and those without.

The government continued to grant broad legal authority to traditional leaders to manage their districts. As part of this authority, traditional leaders continued to exercise control over local mosques, with the right to appoint or dismiss imams. Traditional leaders did not have this same authority over the appointment or dismissal of other religious figures.

State-sponsored radio stations and the sole state-sponsored television station continued to broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and ceremonies

regularly on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers and other officials often attended these ceremonies.

The government provided an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including religious schools. The size of the subsidy was proportional to the size of the student body.

### **Actions by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors**

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued to commit terrorist acts in the Far North Region in what observers said was an attempt to impose their religious and political beliefs. Boko Haram continued to target Muslims, Christians, and traditionalist believers without apparent distinction, while ISIS-WA tended to target and attack military installations and other government property more than civilians.

According to the annual report from international Christian advocacy organization Open Doors, Christians faced a threat of individual assault or kidnapping from Boko Haram while they cultivated their farms in the Far North Region. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) stated that Boko Haram also attacked villages during the year, killing people and burning churches. Some Christians told Open Doors they slept in the forest at night to protect themselves from terrorists.

According to multiple sources, including from local media and civil society, in February, Muslim Mbororo herders killed at least 13 members of the mostly Christian population in Nwa, Northwest Region. During the attacks, they burned down three churches and the residence of the local CBC pastor. According to another CBC pastor in the area, the attacks forced thousands of Nwa residents to flee into the forest and cross the border into Nigeria. The pastor said the attacks only subsided in March after the Mbororo herders withdrew from the area. In February, a pro-Mbororo NGO, the Justice and Dignity Campaign, said prior to the Nwa attacks, separatists – most of whom were Christian residents of the area – killed and abducted several Mbororos in the area, as well as in other parts of the Northwest Region. According to the CBC pastor, while Christian residents and Muslim Mbororo herders managed to coexist despite longstanding tensions over land, the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions had exacerbated tensions, especially as Mbororos regularly allied with the military against separatists.



Boko Haram and ISIS-WA abducted numerous civilians, including Christian women and girls who were often sexually abused and forced into marriage with Muslim men, according to local media outlet *L'Oeil du Sahel*. In October, two human rights activists in the Far North Region said that Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks had worsened in that area when compared with previous years, despite the diminished fighting capacity of Boko Haram. In a 2021 report on religious freedom in the world, Aid to the Church in Need, an international papal charity of the Catholic Church, described the situation for Christians in the country as one in which persecution was prevalent and created an untenable environment for worship.

According to reports, on June 6, a group presumed to be separatists attacked the Francis Xavier Pastoral Centre in Mamfe, Southwest Region, where several priests had gathered. According to the media, one person died during the attack while a second died in the hospital, and 11 others were wounded. According to UNICEF, one of those killed was a 12-year-old child. Following the attack, Christopher Eboka, a priest of Mamfe Diocese, told the media the frequent attacks indicated the Catholic Church had become the new target of the “belligerents” of the separatist crisis because the perception that the Church was wealthy encouraged some groups to regularly threaten priests and abduct them for ransom.

Suspected separatists had previously abducted Eboka on May 22. According to a diocese-issued press release, the abductors kidnapped him and his commercial motorbike driver during a pastoral trip to celebrate Pentecost. After the abductors released Eboka on May 31, they stated in a video message on social media that they had not collected any ransom and had abducted the priest as a warning to the Catholic Church, which they said was allied with the government and opposed to the independence of the Northwest and Southwest Regions.

On June 8, Humphrey Tata Mbui, the communications secretary for the National Episcopal Conference, representing Catholics in the country, stated in a press release that separatists had abducted Catholic priest Sylvester Ngarba Nsah in March prior to the government arresting him in June. Separatists accused him of collaborating with the military before releasing him. According to the Diocese of Kumbo, separatists kidnapped and tortured Ngarba Nsah twice because he had defied a separatist-supported school boycott by leading the resumption of classes at a Catholic school in Vekovi.

In July, unidentified individuals kidnapped a pastor and two members of Miracle Valley International Gospel Centre in Limbe, Southwest Region as they were

leaving the church after a worship service. The senior pastor of the church, Derek Temiong, identified the kidnappers as separatists and said they asked for a ransom of 600,000 CFA francs (\$1,000) for the release of the three individuals. He said the separatists targeted his church because of its perceived collaboration with the government and its opposition to the independence of the Northwest and Southwest Regions. According to Temiong, the three abductees were released days later after negotiations with the separatists, who did not receive a ransom.

According to a press release issued by the chancellor of the Diocese of Mamfe, Sebastine Sinju, on August 29, armed separatists forced their way into the major seminary compound in Mamfe and abducted the vicar general, Julius Agbortoko. According to the press release, the kidnappers asked for a ransom of 20 million CFA francs (\$34,600). On September 1, Sinju issued a press release that Agbortoko had been released without the payment of a ransom.

According to the PCC, on October 24, five armed individuals on motorbikes abducted the congregational chairperson of the Ntamulung Presbyterian Church, Anastasia Nana, in Bamenda, Northwest Region. The abduction took place at the church compound at the end of a worship service. In a press release issued shortly after the incident, the PCC attributed the abduction to separatists. On October 26, the PCC announced that Nana had been released after spending a night in captivity. The PCC did not specify if the separatists had received a ransom in exchange for her release.

In July, *L'Oeil du Sahel* reported that Boko Haram and ISIS-WA had started applying sharia to Muslims and non-Muslims in the areas of the country under their control near Lake Chad. This included public floggings of smokers and alleged adulterers and cutting off one hand of persons accused of theft.

According to the media, in August, suspected Boko Haram terrorists launched several attacks in Krawa-Mafa, Mayo Tsanaga, Far North Region, where they destroyed one church and many other buildings.

In January, self-proclaimed separatists affiliated with the “Interim Government of Ambazonia,” a group that may hold significant command and control over armed groups on the ground, announced a lockdown of Bamenda, Northwest Region to prevent Catholics from attending a Mass organized during the visit of the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin. In several audio messages on social media, separatists said the Catholic Church was indifferent to the plight of English-speaking Cameroonians and regularly failed to condemn government-perpetrated

human rights abuses. According to media reports, numerous Catholics attended the event. After Parolin's visit, Bamenda-based Muslim scholar Abdulkarim Ali said on social media that some separatists threatened to assault him after he attended the service. The Archbishop of Bamenda, Andrew Nkea Fuanya, and other religious leaders attempted to mediate between the government and separatist fighters throughout the year.

On May 7, separatists fired gunshots during a Mass at Saint Augustine's College, Kumbo, where parishioners had gathered to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the priesthood of the Bishop of Kumbo, George Nkuo. Videos of the attack circulating on social media showed hundreds of panic-stricken civilians fleeing or taking cover amid the sounds of gunfire. On May 8, the pro-separatist media outlet *Bareta News* said the separatists opposed the presence at the event of the Northwest Region governor, Adolphe Lele Lafrique, and viewed his presence as evidence that the Church was collaborating with the government. On May 10, a priest from the Diocese of Kumbo said the worship service was suspended for at least 15 minutes while separatists exchanged gunfire with security forces deployed prior to the event. According to the media, no one was hurt.

On September 4, separatists in Bali announced a ban on PCC activities there because of the PCC moderator's failure to state unequivocally that government forces were responsible for the August 22 shootings. The separatists declared the Church's activities would only resume after the resignation of the moderator and asked PCC Christians to worship at other churches. Following the separatists' announcement, the PCC Ntanfoang chapel in Bali closed for several weeks. On September 5, the PCC moderator instructed all PCC pastors to leave Bali. On October 10, worship services resumed at PCC Ntanfoang after separatists lifted the ban.

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

Because religion, ethnicity, and politics are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

In September, tensions escalated between Muslims and Christians in Ngaoundere, Adamawa Region, according to Etienne Patrice Etoundi Essama, leader of the Cameroon Association for Interreligious Dialogue. Etoundi Essama said the leading imam in the area, Cheikh Mahmoud Ali, accused authorities at the Catholic Mazenod High School of attempting to convert Muslim students to Christianity by compelling them to wear badges bearing a cross. Ali characterized the practice as

a subtle form of evangelization and urged Muslims to withdraw their children from the school. According to the school authorities, the badge was part of a uniform that identified all students at the school, but the uniform requirement had previously not been required for Muslim students. Following government-led mediation on September 12, Minister of Territorial Administration Paul Atanga Nji said that both sides agreed that Muslim students at the school would be exempt from wearing badges bearing a cross. On October 25, the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace service said many Muslim parents withdrew their children from the school after the incident.

In October, a group of evangelical Christians in Douala, Littoral Region, accused an elderly woman of being possessed by demons and assaulted her in her home after she refused to adhere to their doctrine. According to the media, the assailants had previously attacked other individuals in the area who did not share their religious beliefs. Security forces rescued the woman and arrested seven individuals on assault charges and jailed them at the New Bell Prison in Douala. The trial of the seven was proceeding at the Douala Court of First Instance at year's end.

In July, Derek Che Choh, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, announced in a public statement that unidentified individuals had desecrated two churches in Njinikom, Northwest Region. According to Che Choh, on May 14, intruders stole the eucharist from the Perpetual Adoration Chapel in Njinikom Parish. He said on July 8 that in a separate incident, unidentified individuals removed the tabernacle from the wall of the Christ the King parish church in Fuli Kom. Che Choh said the acts were sacrilegious and desecrated the most sacred aspects of the Catholic faith.

In its report covering 2021, NGO Open Doors said that Christians who converted from Islam in the country suffered persecution and were at great risk from their immediate family and their wider community if they told anyone about their conversion, or if Bibles are discovered in their possession.

In October, members of an LGBTQI+ organization in the North Region said they regularly faced the discrimination and violence from other members of their religious communities. They said religious leaders and other worshippers physically assaulted them, often shunned or avoided them during services, and denied them entry into faith-based organizations.

In September, the Cameroon Association for Interreligious Dialogue (ACADIR) organized a roundtable that brought together diverse faith-based organizations to

discuss doctrines and practices that the association said hindered peaceful coexistence and exacerbated religious extremism. Participants at the roundtable discussed the response of Muslim leaders to threats of Boko Haram and ISIS-WA in the Far North Region and addressed perceived religious extremism associated with Pentecostal churches. The roundtable additionally addressed a conflict between Muslims and Christians in Adamawa Region, and discussed the contribution of diverse groups, including women and youth, to national peace and development.

Some prominent religious leaders played significant roles in promoting COVID-19 vaccinations. In June, the Cameroon Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries (CIDIMUC) launched a campaign to sensitize Muslims to the necessity of the vaccinations. CIDIMUC members publicly received their vaccines at Djoungolo Hospital in Yaounde, and Muslim leaders urged worshippers to take the vaccine during prayers at mosques. In June, CIDIMUC produced a commercial promoting COVID-19 vaccination that ran on state-funded CRTV television for several weeks.

In May, ACADIR – in partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of Public Health – organized a workshop in Yaounde during which participants urged Christians and Muslims to wear masks, observe COVID-19 safeguards, and get vaccinated.

On October 9, CIDIMUC organized an interreligious conference to promote interreligious dialogue and multiculturalism and consolidate peace. According to the organizers, the conference sought to highlight the virtues of social cohesion and the contribution of religious groups to conflict prevention and resolution.

In February, ACADIR provided training on interreligious dialogue to Christians and Muslims in Ngaoundere, Adamawa Region. In March and in June, ACADIR provided similar training sessions to Christians and Muslims in Bertoua, East Region, Garoua, North Region and Maroua, Far North Region.

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

Embassy officials discussed interreligious tensions between Muslims and Christians with government officials. In January, embassy officials raised the relations between Muslim Mbororo and local Christians with the mayor of Betare-Oya in the East Region. In October, embassy officials discussed the implications of tensions between Muslims and Christians at a Roman Catholic College in Ngaoundere with the city mayor. During a meeting with a mayor in Bertoua in

March, embassy officials discussed Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks and emphasized the role the administration and local leaders could play in the fight against terrorism.

In May, the Charge d'Affaires hosted a religious freedom roundtable in Yaounde to discuss roles religious leaders could play in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, promoting COVID-19 vaccines, and bringing peace in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. The roundtable included prominent Catholic, evangelical Christian, Muslim, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox religious leaders and scholars. All the religious leaders present expressed frustration at the lack of substantive engagement from the government on issues related to the pandemic and to peace.

Embassy officials discussed the importance of interreligious dialogue and the response of religious leaders to Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks with leaders from Christian and Muslim communities, including the Bishop of Buea, the leader of Caritas-Kumbo, a local branch of the Catholic relief and development agency in the Northwest Region, the PCC moderator, a representative of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, regional ACADIR leaders, and the national coordinator of CIDIMUC. Embassy officials also discussed with these leaders the violence in the Northwest and Southwest Regions and its negative impact on religious freedom.

On March 3, the embassy issued a press release to express concern regarding communal violence between Muslim Mbororos and Christian communities in Nwa. It called for an immediate cessation of violence and urged the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation and to hold those responsible accountable.