

# CHAD 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

At year's end, Transitional President Mahamat Déby, who had previously presided over a 15-member transitional military council, led the country. An August-October National Dialogue disbanded the transitional military council (CMT) and on October 10, gave the former CMT president the title of "Transitional President," with a mandate to govern under a modified Transitional Charter and to prepare for elections by October 2024. The October Transitional Charter establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. It provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits "any act undermining the republican form and secularism of the state."

The government maintained its ban on the leading conservative Wahhabi association from participation on the High Council of Islamic Affairs (HCIA), but media outlets said enforcement of the ban remained difficult and that Wahhabis continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. Public debates over the Islamic practice of *diya* (financial compensation paid to victims of violence), especially as sometimes proposed by local authorities to resolve conflicts between Muslim and Christian individuals or communities, remained an issue.

During the year, Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa were reportedly responsible for lethal attacks against government troops and unarmed civilians in the Lake Chad region, including one on November 22 that killed 38 soldiers. Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks, which continued throughout the year, particularly in Lac Province, and to advocate for continued additional security in places of worship. Much of the country remained relatively free from significant conflict between religious groups and violence from extremist movements. Internal political conflict between elites in power and opposition groups took on a religious dimension at times, with Catholic leaders openly criticizing the political process. Both the Archbishop of N'Djamena, Edmond Djitangar, and Djimalngar Madjibaye of the Association of Evangelical Churches and Missions (EEMET) boycotted the November 28 National Day of Prayer and Peace for the first time since the annual celebration began in 2012. Protestant leader Madjibaye said that a "festive celebration around political

authorities in a public place is not desirable,” given the social climate dampened by intercommunal violence and the October 20 crackdown on the political opposition protesting against the two-year extension of the transitional government. Analysts and human rights groups reported that poverty, a lack of government services, and economic opportunity raised the risks that violent extremism, including violent extremism related to religion, would spread to the country.

The U.S. Ambassador met multiple times with the president of the HCIA to discuss interfaith dialogue, peace, and the role of Islam in Chadian society. He also met with the Archbishop of N’Djamena and Madjibaye of EEMET to discuss how the United States could best assist the country in promoting a credible democratic transition in which all voices can have a meaningful impact on the process.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 18.0 million (mid-year 2022). According to 2014-15 demographic estimate, 52.1 percent of the population is Muslim, 23.9 percent Protestant, 20 percent Roman Catholic, 0.3 percent animist, 0.2 percent other Christian, 2.8 percent no religion, and 0.7 percent unspecified. Most Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A small minority hold beliefs associated with Wahhabism, Salafism, or follow the political-religious doctrine espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. Most Protestants are evangelical Christians. There are small numbers of Baha’is and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

There is a significant Muslim presence in the south, but minimal Christian presence in the north. Religious distribution is mixed in urban areas, and indigenous religions are often practiced to some degree along with Islam and Christianity.

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

### **Legal Framework**

In October, the National Dialogue provided CMT President Déby with a mandate to govern under a modified Transitional Charter as “Transitional President” and to

prepare for elections by October 2024. The October Transitional Charter establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. It provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits “any act undermining the republican form and secularism of the state.”

A 2020 constitutional amendment removed a denominational oath of office that had required government directors and general secretaries and above to take an oath “under God” or “under Allah;” the government, however, suspended the constitution in April 2021. The modified Transitional Charter is silent on this point.

Under the law, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralized Territorial Collectivities. Associations must provide a list of all the founding members and their positions in the organization, founders’ resumes, copies of the founders’ identification cards, minutes of the establishment meetings, a letter to the minister requesting registration, principal source of the organization’s revenue, address of the organization, a copy of its rules and procedures, and statutory documents of the organization. The ministry conducts background checks on every founding member and establishes a six-month temporary, but renewable, authorization to operate, pending final authorization and approval. Failure to register with the ministry means that organizations are not considered legal entities and may not open bank accounts or enter into contracts; it may also lead to the banning of a group. Group founders or board members may be subject to one month to one year in prison and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$81 - \$820) for failure to register. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

*Burqas*, defined by ministerial notice as “any garment where one sees only the eyes,” are forbidden by ministerial decree. The ministerial notice also applies to *niqabs*, although this ban is routinely unenforced.

The Transitional Charter states public education shall be secular. The government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits religious groups to operate private schools, and there are numerous schools operated by Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups.

The HCIA, an independent government body, oversees Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic-language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country's Muslim community at international Islamic forums. The government approves those nominated by members of the HCIA to serve on the council. Wahhabis are nominated to serve on the council but have not participated due to their stated concerns regarding the council's role in the government ban on their activities. Muslim Brotherhood adherents also sit on the council, operating under the umbrella of Sufi groups rather than as overt representatives of Muslim Brotherhood groups. The Grand Imam of N'Djamena, who is selected by a committee of Muslim elders and approved by the government, is the de jure president of the HCIA and oversees the heads of the HCIA branches and grand imams from each of the country's 23 provinces. He has the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, to regulate the content of mosque sermons, and to control activities of Islamic charities. Even though the country is legally defined as a secular state, the HCIA has jurisdiction for some issues, including personal status issues such as marriage, property dispositions between spouses, divorce, and parentage.

The law prohibits media reports that are likely to "incite hatred."

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralized Territorial Collectivities oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating intercommunal conflict, reporting on religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom. It also reports concerns and suggestions regarding religious activities to the Minister of Territorial Administration, who has the authority to ban or sanction activities. The position of office director rotates every two years between Muslims, Protestants, and Catholics. The office contains a special bureau for Hajj and Umrah under the supervision of the Presidency of the Republic, with members chosen annually by presidential decree. The HCIA deals directly with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralized Territorial Collectivities or with the civil Office of the President of the Republic to address concerns with Wahhabi groups.

The Transitional Charter is silent on the question of military service, despite military service having been obligatory under the previous constitution (suspended in April 2021), which prohibited invoking religious belief to "avoid an obligation dictated by the national interest." This statute largely applies in case of

wartime mobilization, since the country does not have universal military conscription.

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

### **Government Practices**

During the year, the government maintained its ban on the participation of the leading Wahhabi group, Ansar al-Sunna, in the HCIA. According to civil rights organizations, however, enforcement was especially difficult due to strained government capacity during the ongoing political transition; Wahhabi adherents continued to meet, worship in their own mosques, and release communiques. Local media said one reason Wahhabi groups continued their activities was that a number of government and security officials came from the same region or tribe as the Wahhabi leaders. Local media reported that the HCIA president reconciled with Wahhabi groups, in contrast with the approach of his predecessor, whom many generally viewed as anti-Wahhabist. Wahhabis continued to receive financial support from abroad as individuals rather than as a group, according to local media.

According to local observers, the government continued to deploy security forces around both Islamic and Christian places of worship, in particular on Fridays around mosques and on Sundays around churches.

Although he had the legal authority to do so, the Grand Imam of N'Djamena reportedly did not, in practice, regulate the content of sermons.

Local media reported that religious tensions fueled farmer-herder violence. The disputes reportedly started from land-use issues rather than religion, although witnesses commonly associate herders with Islam and farmers with Christianity.

Religious tensions sometimes increased when local authorities proposed the use of Islamic diya as a means of resolving conflicts with Christian groups that refused to pay or accept diya.

In October, officials swore in the Transitional President without using a denominational oath of office.

In the course of discussions on contentious social issues, the August-to-October National Dialogue identified diya as a “corrupted” practice and a major source of social discord. The Dialogue added that the diya should be applied “only in communities where it is recognized” and with respect for rules and regulations already in effect, while “fighting the slightest expansion of this practice to communities” not recognizing this method of conflict resolution.

The Dialogue also recommended restarting government efforts to adopt a family code that would codify women’s inheritance rights, a move historically resisted by Muslim leaders in a way that “takes into account all reservations of religious groups.” The current family code remains in draft form. The Dialogue called for strengthened collaboration between the judicial sector and the HCIA and stated that sentences handed down by the latter should only apply to those who seek adjudication through the HCIA.

The Dialogue also called for avoiding the abuse of religion for political ends and stoking intercommunal violence. In this vein, the Dialogue called for peaceful coexistence, while recommending that the state ban religious authorities from all public political activity.

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

External analysts concluded the country, which comprises a diverse society with many tribal, ethnic, and religious identities, remained relatively free from significant conflict between religious groups during the year. According to observers, most conflicts took place between farmers and herders over competing uses of land and an asymmetric balance of power between state-backed herding interests and marginalized farming interests rather than religious identity. Analysts stated that lengthy periods of largely southern and Christian rule from 1960 to 1979, followed by largely northern and Muslim rule between 1979 and 2021, against the backdrop of widespread poverty created an association between religion and geographic region that political actors continued to exploit for their purposes. Media outlets reported that inhabitants of N’Djamena and other large cities self-segregated according to religious divisions.

Protestant leader Madjibaye said that a “festive celebration around political authorities in a public place is not desirable,” given the social climate dampened

by intercommunal violence and the October 20 crackdown on the political opposition protesting against the two-year extension of the transitional government.

Analysts and human rights groups reported poverty and a lack of government services and economic opportunity raised the risks that violent extremism, including extremism related to religion, could spread to the country, especially in the Lake Chad region, where Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa launched attacks against government soldiers and unarmed civilians during the year. In February, a Boko Haram attack killed five soldiers in the Lake Chad region. In August, another attack killed two Chadian soldiers, and in November, a third attack likely killed dozens of Chadian soldiers. In September, a Boko Haram attack killed four soldiers in Hadjer-Lamis, south of Lake Chad. The Chadian military remained active in its fight against Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa in the Lake Chad region.

Religious leaders, including imams, continued to raise awareness among adherents of the risks of terrorist attacks, particularly in Lac Province, and to advocate for continued additional security in places of worship.

In accordance with the legal prohibition against “inciting hatred,” media coverage continued to not mention instances of religious tension or conflict, instead using the term “communalism” – allegiance to a specific group or community rather than to wider society – to refer in general to divisions among various groups or communities, whether based on geographic, ethnic, religious, or other loyalties.

The Archbishop of N’Djamena and Djimalngar Madjibaye of EEMET boycotted the National Day of Prayer and Peace celebration for the first time since it began in 2012. The Archbishop’s decision followed months of intense public scrutiny by the Catholic leader of the political process and National Dialogue, which, he said, did not “keep its promises.” The Catholic bishops’ organization, the Episcopal Conference of Chad, had withdrawn from the National Dialogue before its conclusion, citing disappointment with its lack of inclusiveness and “undemocratic” way of operating. The bishops did not, however, call for other Christians to withdraw and stated they would continue to pray for the participants to achieve the dialogue’s objectives.

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

The U.S. Ambassador met periodically with the president of the HCIA and discussed interfaith dialogue, peace, and the role of Islam in Chadian society.

The Ambassador also met with other faith leaders, including Archbishop Djitangar and EEMET head Djimalngar Madjibaye, to leverage moral leadership as a channel for credible national reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. The Ambassador engaged with local religious authorities in Abeche, Bol, Gaoui, and Massenya to discuss interfaith dialogue and support efforts to counter extremist messages related to religion.

The U.S. embassy amplified messages promoting religious freedom and tolerance throughout the year, including on social media.