

# GUINEA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The country's constitutional elected government was overthrown in a military coup d'état in September 2021. The self-proclaimed National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD) suspended the constitution and dissolved the National Assembly. The CNRD's Transition Charter, which serves in lieu of a constitution, states the country is a secular state and any act undermining the secular nature of the state or one's religious freedom is to be considered a "high crime" punishable by fines and imprisonment. The penal code provides for freedom of worship within limits defined by the law. In addition, the Transition Charter stipulates that two members of the National Transition Council, the current national legislative body, are to be religious community representatives.

The cabinet-level Secretariat General of Religious Affairs (SRA) continued to issue weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. Although the SRA did not control sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors continued to be present in every region and were responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. In September, the SRA prohibited an imam from preaching and accused him of "gross misconduct" after he posted a video on social media in which he criticized the President of the Transition (the interim president). A Wahhabi mosque, closed by local authorities in September 2021 for noncompliance with government regulations regarding places of worship, reopened for Friday prayers in February following a conflict-resolution mission by the Secretary General of the SRA. Following a two-year suspension due to COVID-19, the annual Muslim pilgrimage resumed, with the SRA authorizing 4,527 pilgrims to travel to Mecca.

In February, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization attempted to resolve a long-running land dispute between an Indigenous Muslim Susu group and the Catholic monastery in Kendoumaya, Lower Guinea. Both sides welcomed the government's intervention, but by year's end, the dispute was not resolved and a number of related legal cases remained pending in the courts. In May, the marriage of a well-known Christian journalist to a Muslim

woman fueled widespread public debate about interfaith marriages and created social and religious tension, according in the press and on social media. The parents of the woman requested the authorities to annul the marriage. The controversy led a blogger to form a movement in support of the woman's family against the marriage and to organize a demonstration to protest the marriage. Authorities arrested and prosecuted the blogger for posting threats and insults on social media likely to disturb the public order; he was later released under judicial supervision.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officials met on multiple occasions with SRA officials, the Grand Imam, the Catholic Archbishop of Conakry, Baha'i leaders, and Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss religious tolerance, reconciliation, and social cohesion. In April, the Ambassador hosted an iftar with U.S. government-funded exchange program alumni, fostering a cross-cultural discussion on issues of religious tolerance and diversity in the country. Funding from the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative supported training for Islamic leaders to incorporate messaging to counter malaria into their sermons and religious ceremonies. The embassy regularly posted messages encouraging religious tolerance on its social media platforms during major religious holidays including Ramadan, Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), and Easter.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.2 million (midyear 2022). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent are Christian, and 7 percent adhere to Indigenous religious or other beliefs. Much of the Muslim and Christian populations incorporate Indigenous rituals into their religious practices. Muslims are generally Maliki Sunni; Sufism is also present. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is also a small Baha'i community in addition to small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four regions of the country. Christians are concentrated in large cities, including Conakry, in southern coastal areas, and in

the eastern Forest Region. Adherents of Indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The 2021 Transition Charter states that the country is a secular state and that any act undermining its secular nature or an individual's religious freedom is to be considered a "high crime" punishable by fines and imprisonment. The penal code provides for freedom of worship "under the conditions and in the forms provided for by law." The penal code states that any individual who through assault or threats prevents one or more persons from practicing their religion is punishable by one to three months' imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to one million Guinean francs (\$58-\$117). The penal code also states that preventing, delaying, or interrupting religious practices in a place of worship by public disturbance is punishable by two to six months' imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to one million Guinean francs (\$58-\$117). In addition, the penal code states that any person who in any way desecrates a place of worship or objects of worship within the place of worship may be punished by six months to one year's imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to one million Guinean francs (\$58-\$117). Anyone who insults a religious leader in the function of his or her duties may be punished by six months to two years' imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to one million Guinean francs (\$58-\$117). If the individual also threatens, assaults, or injures the religious leader, the punishment is increased to two to five years' imprisonment, with the same fine.

In addition, the Transition Charter stipulates two religious community members serve as representatives on the 81-member CNT, the country's current legislative body, installed in February. An assistant to the Grand Imam of Conakry (who also serves as the second vice president of the CNT), and the bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Guinea and Guinea-Bissau were the two members named respectively by the Islamic and Christian councils of the country.

The Transition Charter did not change the laws and processes applicable to the registration of religious groups or the overall authorities of the SRA. The SRA must approve all religious groups. Groups must provide a written constitution

and application to the SRA along with their address and a fee of 250,000 Guinean francs (\$29). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes officially recognized. Every six months, each registered religious group must present a report of its activities to the government. Registering with the government entitles religious groups to an exemption from the value-added tax (VAT) on imported shipments and makes them eligible for select energy subsidies.

Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. By law, the government may shut down unregistered groups and expel their leaders. There is limited opportunity for legal appeal of these penalties.

Religious groups may not own radio or television stations.

The compulsory primary school curriculum does not include religious studies. Many parents send their children to Quranic schools (madrassahs), either in addition to primary school or as their primary form of education.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry and the principal mosques in the main cities of the country's four regions are government employees. These mosques are directly under the administration of the government. Other mosques and some Christian groups receive government subsidies for pilgrimages.

The SRA appoints national directors to lead the Offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs, the Endowment, and Inspector General, which all fall under the SRA. The SRA is charged with promoting good relations among religious groups and coordinates with other members of the informal Interreligious Council, which is composed of the SRA and representatives from the Islamic faith and the Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant churches.

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

## **Government Practices**

On September 15, the SRA stated that Imam Elhadj Yaya Camara was prohibited from “preaching or speaking in the name of Islam in public” after he committed what the SRA termed “gross misconduct.” The SRA acted a few days after Camara posted a video on Facebook in which he criticized President of the Transition Mamadi Doumbouya and denounced the high cost of living. He also stated that many Guineans no longer supported Doumbouya. In 2019, the country’s previous government removed Yaya Camara from his duties as imam of the mosque of Kignifi village, a Conakry suburb, after Yaya Camara opposed a third term for then-President Alpha Conde, whom Doumbouya toppled in 2021. Yaya Camara immediately appealed the September decision to the Supreme Court, which denied his appeal on December 1. His lawyer said that his client was never summoned to testify before the religious authorities who had prohibited him from preaching.

The SRA continued to issue guidance outlining themes for discussion during Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. The stated purpose of the weekly guidance was to harmonize religious views to prevent radical or political messages in sermons. Although the SRA did not monitor sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors continued to be present in every region and were responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. The SRA continued to discipline clerics it judged to be noncompliant through warnings, temporary suspensions, and permanent dismissals. Although deviations from approved guidance were often reported in various sermons at mosques and other Islamic events, the SRA said it continued to have difficulty imposing disciplinary sanctions due to a lack of funding and resources.

According to the SRA, Imam Elhadj Moussa Doumbouya, whom the SRA barred from preaching in 2021 for violating a COVID-19 ban on evening prayers during Ramadan, was permitted to resume preaching in March. He replaced another imam at a mosque in the Senkefara, Upper Guinea.

A Wahhabi mosque located in Misside Hinde, which local religious authorities in Labe in Middle Guinea had closed in September 2021, reopened for Friday prayers in February following a conflict-resolution mission carried out by the SRA Secretary General the same month. The mosque had been closed for noncompliance with government guidance regarding places of worship, following

a complaint from a more moderate Tijaniyah Sufi group in the area. The SRA Secretary General also utilized the mission to meet Tijani and Sunni groups, whose continuing disagreements, according to the SRA, indicated a lack of respect for each other's interpretations of Islamic religious practices and teaching methods in mosques and in Quranic learning centers, and differing adherence to SRA regulations.

Some religious groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relationship with the SRA. For example, although formally registered with the SRA, the Baha'is did not take part in activities initiated by the SRA in order to maximize internal control over their own religious practices.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been registered in the country since 1993 as a religious association. In September, the organization applied to renew their registration, but the procedure was not completed by year's end due to administrative processing delays, according to the group's local president.

The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca resumed in July after a two-year suspension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SRA authorized travel for 4,527 pilgrims.

Islamic schools continued to be prevalent throughout the country and remained the traditional forum for religious education. Some Islamic schools were wholly private, while others received local government support. Islamic schools, particularly common in the Fouta Djallon highland area, taught the compulsory government curriculum, along with additional Quranic studies. Private Christian schools in Conakry and other large cities continued to accept students of all religious groups. These schools taught the compulsory curriculum without government support and held voluntary Christian prayers before school.

Many Muslim students not enrolled in private Islamic schools continued to receive religious education at madrassahs, some of which were associated with mosques and others supported by local communities. Unlike Islamic schools, the madrassahs did not teach the compulsory primary school curriculum. The government did not recognize the madrassahs nor require them to register, allowing them to operate freely. They focused on Quranic studies, and instruction was in Arabic rather than the French used in most other schools. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states supported some madrassahs. Most

students in madrassahs also attended part-time public or private schools that taught the compulsory curriculum.

The government continued to allocate free broadcast time on state-owned national television for Islamic and Christian programming, including Islamic religious instruction, Friday prayers, and church services. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio and encouraged equal time for Christian and Muslim groups.

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

On January 23, animist residents of Kolakpata reportedly attacked an evangelical Christian church and the homes of its pastor and members after previously requesting that the church be closed. According to local media, the residents were upset that the church would not permit the animists' end-of-year celebration rituals. Media said the church, the pastor's home, and two other homes were destroyed. The public prosecutor said the incident would be investigated, but it was not completed by year end.

On February 22, a high-level mission led by the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, accompanied by local authorities, attempted to negotiate a settlement between Indigenous Muslim Susu villagers and the Catholic Saint-Jean monastery over a long-running land dispute in Kendoumaya, Lower Guinea. Villagers claimed as theirs parcels of land near the monastery, which they began selling to third parties in 2020, and they said the church had not honored earlier commitments to pave the main road from Coyah to Kendoumaya, provide electricity to the village, and build a local school. In 2021, the church's lawyer said the church had made no such commitments, and church authorities stated then that such projects could only be carried out by the government, because of the costs. The disagreements led to demonstrations and occasional violence, including an attack on a monk by villagers in 2021 that aroused indignation within the broader Christian community and worsened tensions, according to monastery leaders. According to the church's lawyer, the villagers publicly admitted ceding land to the church in the past, but following the demonstrations and violence, they demanded a return of the church's rights to the land. The church claimed that a social movement focused on recovering ancestral lands from outside settlers, such as the church, had manipulated the

villagers into changing their stance on the land. According to media reports, villagers and the church welcomed government involvement to resolve the issue. By year's end, the dispute had not been resolved, and various related cases filed by the church and by villagers in 2020 and 2021 remained pending in the courts. The two sides continued to negotiate under instructions from the Minister to the Governor of the region to maintain dialogue until the conflict was resolved.

In parts of the country, especially the middle and upper regions, particularly strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure continued to discourage conversion from Islam, according to observers.

In May, the marriage of a well-known Christian radio journalist to a Muslim woman fueled public debate, generated critical postings on social media, and created social and religious tensions, according to local media reports. The woman's family accused the husband of forcing their daughter to convert to Christianity and asked authorities to annul the marriage. Muslim and Christian religious leaders also expressed their views about the marriage. The Grand Imam of Conakry told local media that Islam does not allow a non-Muslim man to marry a Muslim woman. The head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the country argued against the marriage in the local press, noting that if a pastor celebrated a marriage without consent of one of the families, he violated an Old Testament passage which required a couple to have the same ideals for a marriage. An evangelist from a small community of Christian converts maintained that the woman was rejected by her family because of her choice and therefore she had the right to marry without involving her family. On May 17, a Muslim blogger created an online "Movement for the Defense of Our Values" to support the woman's family and organized a sit-in in front of the headquarters of the journalist's radio station to protest the marriage. On instructions from a local prosecutor, the judicial police arrested the blogger and charged him with making public threats and insults and making available information on social media likely to disturb public order; both are civil offenses. On June 7, the blogger was released without trial and placed under judicial supervision, which involved regular court visits and limits on his freedom of movement.

According to the SRA, in July, a church was burned in the Forest Region. The victims did not take the case to the authorities, however, and the SRA had no additional information on the incident.



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

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met on multiple occasions with SRA officials, the Grand Imam, the Catholic Archbishop, Baha'i leaders, and Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss religious tolerance, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

On February 10 and October 19, the Ambassador and other embassy officials participated in official tours of the Conakry Grand Mosque, the fourth largest mosque in Africa, and met with the Grand Imam to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. When the transition government presented the results of the national reconciliation conference on August 24 and opened the national dialogue on November 24, the Ambassador, the Grand Imam, and the Catholic Archbishop of Conakry discussed the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in the country.

The Ambassador hosted an iftar for U.S.-funded exchange program alumni on April 14 that fostered an interfaith, cross-cultural discussion on issues of religious tolerance and diversity and connected members of various faith communities in the country.

Throughout the year, training programs funded by the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative in 596 mosques across the country helped Islamic leaders incorporate community messaging to counter malaria into their sermons and religious ceremonies.

The embassy also implemented a program against female genital mutilation that emphasized that religion does not recommend this practice and conveyed messages of religious tolerance towards women and girls who were victims. The program included engagement with influential religious leaders in promoting religious tolerance.

The embassy regularly posted messages on its social media platforms on major religious holidays, including Ramadan, Tabaski, and Easter to encourage religious tolerance.