



Mali

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 474,764 square miles and a population of 11,995,400. Muslims comprise an estimated 90 percent of the population; the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. Approximately 5 percent of the population is Christian, and the Christian community is roughly two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant. The remaining 5 percent practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs or no religion. Atheism and agnosticism are rare. Most immigrants come from neighboring countries and either practice Sunni Islam or belong to a Christian denomination. The majority of citizens practice their religion daily.

Christian communities tend to be located in and around urban areas, generally in the southern regions. Groups that practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs reside throughout the country, but they are most active in rural areas.

The Muslim community in general is tolerant and respectful of minority religious groups. Mosques associated with Dawa (an Islamic fundamentalist group) are located in Kidal, Mopti, and Bamako. Dawa has gained some adherents among unemployed youth living in poorer neighborhoods. However, the Dawa group's influence was less evident than in previous reporting periods. The Salafi/Wahhabi movement is evident throughout the country, although, as with other forms of Islam in Mali, is not as exclusionary as practiced in other countries.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. The Constitution defines the country as a secular state and allows for religious practices that do not pose a threat to social stability and peace.

The Government requires the registration of all public associations, including religious associations; however, registration confers no tax preference or other legal benefits, and failure to register is not penalized in practice. The registration process is routine and not burdensome. The Government does not require traditional indigenous religious groups to register.

Foreign missionary groups operated without government interference, and they did not link the benefits of their

development activities to conversion. The Government allows members of various religious groups to proselytize freely.

Prior to making important decisions on potentially controversial national issues, the Government consults with a "Committee of Wise Men" that includes the Catholic archbishop and Protestant and Muslim leaders.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Local Collectivities may prohibit religious publications that defame another religion; however, there were no reports of instances of such prohibitions during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Adherents of different religious groups are often part of the same family. Followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers met regularly with religious authorities and government officials who deal with these issues. Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote religious freedom, mutual understanding, and the continued secularism of the Government. The Embassy maintained contact with the foreign missionary community and worked with government officials and societal leaders to promote religious freedom.

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