



Ghana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 238,538 square miles and a population of 22 million. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, 8.5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6.9 percent is classified as other religious groups, which includes those who profess no religious beliefs. The Muslim community disputed these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is substantially larger.

Christian groups include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, F'eden, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostals, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Several Islamic traditions are present in the country: Orthodox Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufi, and a small number of Shi'a.

Indigenous religious groups include Afrikania. Other religious groups include the Baha'i, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Shintoist, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarian. There are also some syncretistic groups that combine elements of Christianity and Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population resides in northern areas as well as in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of indigenous religious beliefs reside in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Government employees, including the President, are required to swear an oath upon taking office. The oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

There is no government body that regulates or oversees religious affairs, as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Registrar General's Department to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were no reports that the Government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register.

The Government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income.

The Ministry of Education includes religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum.

The Government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions Christian and Muslim prayers are used; occasionally there are indigenous invocations. Throughout the reporting period, the President and Vice-President made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. President Mills received delegations of Christian and Muslim leaders soon after assuming office in January 2009 and called for the creation of national days of prayer for both Christians and Muslims.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government 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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Traditional village authorities and families continued to banish rural women, often older women and widows, for suspected witchcraft. Fellow villagers identified these women as the cause of difficulties such as illness, crop failure, or financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps," villages in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions that are populated by suspected witches. The women did not face formal legal sanction if they returned home; however, most feared that they would be beaten or killed if they returned to their village or attempted to pursue legal action to challenge the charges against them.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus indigenous practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Some religious leaders actively advocated tolerance toward other religious groups and discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, and harassment; others, particularly laypersons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other groups such as Muslims and indigenous religious groups.

Some Muslims continued to feel a sense of political and social exclusion, citing token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, the preponderance of Christian prayers in public settings, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans as contributing to this perception of marginalization and discrimination within the Muslim community. However, the new administration appointed several Muslims to lead ministries, and all the major political parties campaigned actively in Muslim communities during the 2008 electoral season.

Government agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, continued to campaign against Trokosi, a practice in the Volta region of pledging youth (commonly young females) to extended service at indigenous shrines. Afrikania and other supporters of traditional African religious groups continued to accuse human rights NGOs of misrepresenting their beliefs and regarded government and NGO campaigns against Trokosi as religious persecution.

There were high incidences of human rights abuses at prayer camps, typically Pentecostal, where persons, often with mental illness, were chained up for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water in the name of removing evil spirits. Reports indicated that these practices extended to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, Volta, and Brong Ahafo regions. Mental health care is limited in the country; families, especially in rural communities, have few options for obtaining appropriate care.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

The Embassy administered the Youth Exchange and Study program, which allows 25 students to study in the United States and whose program goals include promoting religious pluralism. The Embassy also sent one person to visit the United States on an International Visitor Leadership Program to learn about interfaith dialogue.