

MALI

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

There were no 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 474,764 square miles and a population of 14.5 million.

Muslims constitute an estimated 90 percent of the population. Nearly all Muslims are Sunni. Most of these are Sufi, although a sizeable minority rejects Sufi traditions and refers to itself as Sunnite or Ahl-al Sunna. The population is 1 percent Christian, of whom approximately two-thirds are Catholic and one-third Protestant. The remaining 9 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs or professes no religion. The majority of citizens practice their religion daily. Groups that practice indigenous religious beliefs reside throughout the country but are most active in rural areas.

There are several mosques associated with the fundamentalist group Dawa al Tabligh; however, their influence appears to have declined in recent years.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

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.

Religious identity is not designated on passports or national identity documents. For national identity documents, the law requires a photograph, which clearly shows the entire face, including hair and the two ears. Citizens may not wear religious headdress in official photos for identity documents if the headdress obstructs any part of the face.

The government requires registration of all public associations, including religious associations; however, registration conferred no tax preference or other legal benefits, and failure to register was not penalized in practice. The registration process was routine and not burdensome. The government did not require indigenous religious groups to register.

The Malian High Council of Islam (HCIM) is an umbrella organization with representatives from all significant Muslim organizations in the country. It served as the main liaison between the government and hundreds of these groups. The government frequently consulted with the HCIM on social issues of national interest. Prior to making important decisions on potentially controversial national issues, the government also consulted with the Committee of Wise Men, which included the Catholic archbishop and Protestant and Muslim leaders.

The minister of territorial administration and local collectivities may prohibit religious publications that defame another religion; however, there were no reports of such prohibitions during the reporting period.

The government is secular. Public schools do not offer religious instruction. A number of private, parochial, and other religious institutions, both Muslim and Christian, exist, and parents faced no legal restrictions to enrolling their children in these schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Mawloud, the Prophet's Baptism, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan), Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There was one unconfirmed report of coerced religious conversion by the terrorist organization al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In November 2009 Alicia Gomez, a Spanish aid worker, was abducted in Mauritania and held as a hostage in Malian territory by elements of AQIM; she was released on March 10. According to an AQIM communiqué, Gomez was released for humanitarian reasons and because she reportedly had converted to Islam during her captivity.

Section III. Status of Societal Action Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The country's strong traditions of tolerance and openness extended to religious practice and belief. Adherents of different religious groups were often part of the same family. Followers of one religion attended religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

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.