

BURKINA FASO

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and religious communities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 61 percent of the population practices Islam, with the majority being Sunni. The government estimates that 19 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs, and 4 percent are members of various Protestant denominations. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Islam and Christianity are consistently practiced in tandem with indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians live in the center of the country. Persons practice indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provides the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religious beliefs were practiced freely without government interference.

The government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. According to the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 cfa francs (\$108 to \$325).

Religious organizations operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. The Ministry of Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group.

The government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

Public schools did not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools and some tertiary schools. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The government does not fund religious schools, nor does it require them to pay taxes unless they conduct for-profit activities. The government reviews the curricula of religious schools to ensure that they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, it does not seek to influence religious curricula.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom and the government respected existing laws and provisions.

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications.

Although the Ministry of Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation.

Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures, such as zoning regulations, in pursuit of particular activities; however, they did not experience bureaucratic procedures that were more onerous than those experienced by nonreligious groups.

The government and traditional authorities, such as customary chiefs and members of royal families, worked together during the year to stop persecutions of individuals accused of witchcraft. In particular, the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity initiated specific awareness programs with ethnic Mossi villages and assisted with mediation efforts between suspected “witches” and village elders.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

However, at times, community members forced elderly women accused of being witches to flee their villages. During the year, the Catholic-operated Delwende center housed approximately 317 persons accused of witchcraft. The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity provides financial assistance to the Delwende center. Another similar government-funded center is located in the Paspanga area in Ouagadougou and houses approximately 100 women. As part of a sensitization campaign led by nongovernmental organizations, women from the two centers demonstrated peacefully on March 6 in Ouagadougou. The Mogho Naaba, Emperor of the Mossi and influential traditional leader, was the sponsor of this event and wrote a letter denouncing the condition of these women and calling for an end to this practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government and religious communities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

In line with its outreach events to discuss religious pluralism and freedom in the United States, the U.S. embassy hosted a multi-faith iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) and selected a Catholic leader to participate in the International Visitor Program that specifically focused on religious freedom and interfaith dialogue. U.S embassy officials also met regularly with Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant

community leaders in Ouagadougou, Dori, Tenkodogo, and Koudougou in an effort to encourage interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance.