

# **GUINEA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religion. The Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) issues 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 were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. Following terrorist attacks in neighboring countries, authorities permanently closed a mosque considered to be too close to the runway of Conakry's international airport.

Following the end of the Ebola epidemic, Saudi Arabia resumed authorizing Guineans to make the annual Hajj pilgrimage for the first time since 2014.

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grand imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance and reconciliation among religious groups. The embassy hosted several iftars with Muslim and other religious leaders throughout the country, conveying each time the importance of religious freedom and harmony.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 12.1 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent is Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the population incorporates some indigenous rituals into its religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni; however, Sufism is also present. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is a small Bahai community. There are also 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 most numerous in Conakry, large cities, the south, and 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 constitution states the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for the right of individuals to choose and profess their religious faith. It recognizes the right of religious institutions and groups to establish and manage themselves freely. It bars political parties that identify with a particular religious group. These rights are subject only to “those limits that are indispensable to maintain the public order and democracy.”

By law, 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 (GNF) (\$27). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes an officially recognized religion. Each registered religious group must present to the government a report on its affairs every six months. Registration entitles religious groups to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and to 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 foreign group 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.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry and the principal mosques in the main cities of the 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 secretary general of religious affairs appoints six national directors to lead the Offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs and the Endowment, and Inspector General. 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

Muslims and members from Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant churches as well as the SRA.

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

### **Government Practices**

The SRA continued to issue mandatory weekly themes for inclusion in Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. The stated purpose of the weekly guidance was to harmonize religious views in order to prevent radical or political connotations in sermons. Although the SRA did not monitor sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors were present in every region and responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. Clerics whom the SRA judged to be noncompliant were subject to disciplinary action.

Opposition politicians continued to say some imams who supported them or their parties were replaced by the government, but offered no specific examples.

After two years of Ebola outbreaks, Saudi Arabia resumed allowing Guineans to participate in the Hajj. The SRA facilitated and organized the travel of approximately 6,000 applicants who each had to pay approximately 40 million GNF (\$4,340) toward the cost of travel. The government continued to subsidize the travel of Catholics on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy, providing 2 billion GNF (\$217,000) compared to 3 billion GNF (\$325,000) in 2015. The decrease in subsidy from the previous year led the government to decide to rotate the benefits to a different Christian group each year, including Anglican, Catholics, and Adventists, for their pilgrimages to the holy sites. The decision to alternate benefits to Christian groups will be implemented beginning in 2017.

According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely but did not receive the tax and other benefits received by registered groups. The small Jehovah's Witness community reportedly proselytized from house to house without interference, although neither it nor the Bahai community requested official recognition. Some groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relationship with the SRA.

The congregation of a mosque closed in December 2015 by the government due to its proximity to Conakry international airport runway said that they accepted the

closure but complained about the lack of communication from the government. Authorities said they closed the mosque in response to terrorist attacks in neighboring countries and said the closure was to prevent a “potential attack” against the airport. The mosque was not compensated for the closure.

Islamic schools were prevalent throughout the country and were 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 region, taught the compulsory government curriculum along with additional Quranic studies. Private Christian schools, which accepted students of all religious groups, existed in the nation’s capital and most other large cities. They taught the compulsory curriculum but did not receive government support and held Christian prayers before school.

The government allocated free broadcast time on state-owned national television for Islamic and Christian programming, including Islamic religious instruction, Friday prayers from the central mosque, and church services. Muslim broadcasts received more air time, while different Christian groups received broadcast time on Sundays on a rotating basis. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio.

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

In some parts of the country such as the middle and the upper regions, strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam.

Members of the Bahai Faith reported being discriminated against, and banned from their families because of their religious beliefs. The wife of the secretary of the spiritual assembly of Conakry reported she received pressure from her family who did not accept her union with her husband, a member of the Bahai Faith.

In February unidentified individuals burned a mosque built and led by the president of the Islamic organization *Nourdine Islam*, a well-known scholar from Kankan. The incident was followed by clashes between groups supportive of the scholar and the suspected perpetrators. The investigation did not conclude why the incident occurred; the scholar stated that it was triggered by family rivalries and jealousy over his fame.

The Office of Christian Affairs reported that the father of two Muslim women accused a pastor of kidnapping his daughters, aged 27 and 29. The women converted to Christianity and started to attend the pastor's church in the suburbs of Conakry. The pastor was interviewed by the police in February but was not detained or charged. According to sources the women were threatened with death by their father for their conversion.

The SRA did not resolve disputes among the Karambaya and Touraya Muslim communities in Touba. No trial took place following 2015 clashes between the two Muslim groups that resulted in five deaths. The two groups quarreled about the building of a new mosque.

The Kalima Catholic Mission did not begin construction on a church despite authorization by the government in 2015. The Muslim community reportedly lobbied against and stopped the project from proceeding the previous year. Religious authorities of both sides continued to work on resolving this issue. The chief of the mission reported local authorities of the region were influenced by Muslims to stop issuing necessary permits in this case.

Many Muslim students not enrolled in private Islamic schools received religious education at madrassahs, some of which were associated with mosques and others supported by local communities. Unlike the Islamic schools, the madrassahs did not teach the compulsory primary school curriculum. Although the government did not recognize the madrassahs or require them to register, it allowed them to operate freely. They focused on Quranic studies and instruction was in Arabic rather than French. Funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states supported some madrassahs. Most students in madrassahs also attended public or private schools teaching the compulsory curriculum, which did not include religious studies.

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

The Ambassador met several times with the secretary of the religious affairs and the grand imam of Conakry. He also met with the grand imams of Labe and Kankan. Each time, he delivered messages of religious tolerance.

U.S. embassy personnel worked closely with the SRA and religious leaders, including the grand imams of Conakry, Kankan, and Labe; Catholic and Anglican bishops; and Islamic and Christian clergy. Embassy officers advocated for religious tolerance.

U.S. embassy personnel participated in several iftar celebrations nationwide to promote good relations and mutual understanding among religious groups and as an opportunity to relay a message of respect for religious freedom and reconciliation among religious groups.