

CHAD 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

A new constitution enacted in May establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. It provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits “denominational propaganda” that inhibits national unity. The government maintained its ban on the leading Wahhabi association, but enforcement of the ban was difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. In April the Catholic Episcopal Bishops Conference criticized the constitutional revision process and called for additional consultation and a referendum. In May during the inauguration of the new government, two Christian incoming ministers refused to swear the required oath of office in the name of “Allah”; one minister who refused to take any oath in the name of God was immediately fired by President Idriss Deby. Religious groups and civil society continued to express concern about the required oath of office, stating it was contrary to the secular nature of the state and excluded Christians.

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for security in places of worship. On National Prayer Day, November 28, religious leaders, including the secretary general of the Chadian Evangelical Umbrella Organization (EEMET), the Catholic Archbishop of N'Djamena, and the head of the High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA), publicly stated they supported the president’s statements advocating religious tolerance.

The U.S. Ambassador hosted an iftar in May for religious leaders, including Muslim, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Baha’i representatives, and government officials, and a second iftar specifically for women, including government officials, journalists, and representatives of civil society organizations. Participants in both events discussed religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador and other embassy representatives maintained a dialogue with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders on religious freedom and supported outreach programs that encouraged religious tolerance and mutual understanding, such as International Religious Freedom Day in October, in partnership with local nongovernmental organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 15.8 million (July 2018 estimate). According to the most recent census, in 2014-15, 52.1 percent of the population is Muslim, 23.9 percent Protestant, 20 percent Roman Catholic, 0.3 percent animist, 0.2 percent other Christian, 2.8 percent no religion, and 0.7 percent unspecified. Most Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A small minority hold beliefs associated with Wahhabism or Salafism. The majority of Protestants are evangelical Christians. There are also small numbers of Baha'is and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or indigenous religions; religious distribution is mixed in urban areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The new constitution enacted in May establishes the state as secular and affirms the separation of religion and state. The constitution provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. These rights may be regulated by law and may be limited by law only to ensure mutual respect for the rights of others and for the "imperative" of safeguarding public order and good morals. It prohibits "denominational propaganda" that infringes on national unity or the secular nature of the state.

The new constitution requires an oath of office for ministers, which was not previously required of ministers or bureaucrats. Article 105 states, "The president of the republic appoints ministers. Before taking office, the ministers take an oath before the president of the republic according to the denominational formula stated by the law." The law originally stated that those sworn in must take an oath under "Allah"; however, after criticism it was changed to "under God" or "under Allah" in June.

Under the law, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Public Security, and Local Governance. The associations must provide a list of all the founding members and their positions in the organization, founders' resumes, copies of the founders' identification cards, minutes of the establishment meetings, a letter to the minister requesting registration, principal source of the organization's revenue, address of the organization, a copy of its rules and procedures, and statutory documents of the organization. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, Public Security, and

Local Governance conducts background checks on every founding member and establishes a six-month temporary, but renewable, authorization to operate, pending final authorization and approval. Failure to register with the ministry means that organizations are not considered legal entities and may not open bank accounts or enter into contracts; it may also lead to the banning of a group. Group founders or board members may be subject to one month to a year in prison and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$83 to \$830). Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

Burqas, defined by ministerial notice as any garment where one sees only the eyes, are forbidden by ministerial decree. The ministerial notice also applies to *niqabs*, although this is not widely enforced.

The constitution states public education shall be secular. The government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits religious groups to operate private schools.

The government-created HCIA oversees Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums. Wahhabis are not officially represented on the council and are banned by the government. The Grand Imam of N'Djamena, who is selected by a committee of Muslim elders and approved by the government, is the de facto president of the HCIA and oversees the grand imams from each of the country's 23 regions. He has the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and control activities of Islamic charities. In practice, he does not regulate sermons.

The constitution states military service is obligatory and prohibits invoking religious belief to "avoid an obligation dictated by the national interest." The government does not enforce conscription, however.

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Public Security, and Local Governance oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating intercommunal conflict, reporting on religious practices, coordinating religious pilgrimages, and ensuring religious freedom.

According to regulations of the College of Control and Monitoring Oil Revenues, the government board that oversees the distribution of oil revenues, Muslim and

Christian leaders share a rotational position on the board. The position is held for three years and may be renewed only once.

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

Government Practices

The government maintained its ban on the leading Wahhabi group, Ansar-al Suna; however, enforcement was difficult and adherents continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. They also continued to receive revenue through their leaders or from individuals.

In April the Episcopal Bishops Conference of Chad, representing Catholic bishops in the country, publicly criticized the constitutional revision process, calling for additional consultation and a referendum in place of the parliamentary adoption vote. The bishops expressed their concern that the process had the potential to create “serious division” among citizens. They further stated that the oath of office directly contradicts both the first article of the new constitution, which affirms the country as a secular state, and Article 14, which assures “equality before the law without distinction as to origin, race, gender, religion, public opinion, or social position.”

During the May 10 investiture ceremony for the new cabinet, ministers were required to take an oath of office for the first time since the country gained independence in 1960. The oath of office used at the investiture ceremony included the phrase “in the name of Allah the Almighty.” During the ceremony, two new ministers who were Christian refused to swear the oath of office. Madeleine Alingue, the incoming Minister of Postal Services, refused to swear in the name of “Allah” and substituted the word “God.” After initially balking at this formulation, President of the Supreme Court Samir Adam Annour accepted this oath, by some reports after intervention by President Deby. Rosine Amane Djibergui, a Protestant Christian and the incoming minister of civil aviation, refused to take the oath at all, saying her Christian faith prohibited her from making oaths or swearing on the Bible. President Deby fired her on the spot and announced her replacement.

Civil society and religious groups continued to express concern about the new oath of office, some on grounds it was contrary to the secular nature of the state and others because they said it excluded Christians. During the July 16 meeting organized by the EEMET, pastors unanimously opposed the oath of office along

confessional lines on the principle that the country is a secular state, specifying that the oath should not include any religious connotation. They stated that the oath of office directly contradicted the first article of the new constitution, which affirms the country as a secular state, and Article 14, which assures “equality before the law without distinction as to origin, race, gender, religion, public opinion, or social position.”

Due to economic and financial constraints, the government discontinued its long-running public education campaign in the national media to inform individuals of the burqa ban.

The government continued to deploy security forces around both Islamic and Christian places of worship, in particular on Fridays around mosques and Sundays around churches, as well as other occasions for religious events.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for continued additional security in places of worship.

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, comprising representatives of evangelical Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, met regularly. In November at National Prayer Day, they publicly reiterated their commitment to educate their respective groups on the necessity of peaceful cohabitation.

Catholic Archbishop of N’Djamena Edmond Jitangar continued to seek funds from nongovernmental and international sources for reconstruction of the Catholic cathedral in N’Djamena, which was damaged in 1980 during the country’s civil war and which remained closed. In May he announced the creation of an association based in France to support fundraising for the project.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other’s ceremonies and celebrations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador hosted an iftar in May attended by 50 religious leaders, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Baha’i representatives, and government officials. At the iftar, attendees discussed religious freedom and

tolerance in the country. A second iftar, held specifically for women, included 41 participants, including government officials, journalists, and representatives of civil society organizations. Embassy officials continued to meet regularly with imams in training sessions and workshops to promote tolerance and human rights, such as the nomination of an HCIA member to an interfaith dialogue workshop. The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met with the Grand Imam of N'Djamena and with Catholic, Protestant, and Baha'i leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom and tolerance, as well as to discuss efforts to counter extremist messages related to religion.