

GHANA 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice their religion. Registration is required for religious groups to have legal status. Muslim leaders continued to report that some publicly funded Christian mission schools required female Muslim students to remove their hijab and required Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, and there were also continued reports that publicly funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear hijabs. These practices occurred despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting them.

Muslim and Christian leaders continued to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance. For example, representatives of the national chief imam made statements emphasizing the importance of fostering interfaith communication. In September a cross section of religious leaders from the Upper West Region inaugurated the Wa Christian-Muslim Dialogue Committee, a forum to mitigate conflict and promote interfaith understanding.

The U.S. embassy continued to engage with government officials to emphasize the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy urged the government to restart dialogue with religious communities regarding concerns over religious accommodations in publicly funded, religiously affiliated schools. The embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders and community organizations and sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. For example, in June the Ambassador hosted an iftar with religious leaders from various faiths during which he emphasized the importance of nurturing interfaith understanding and protecting religious freedom as foundations of peace and security.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 27.5 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the 2010 government census (the most recent estimate available), approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous or animistic religious beliefs, and 6 percent belongs to other religious groups or has no religious beliefs. Smaller religious groups include the

Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, Eden Revival Church International, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quaker), and numerous nondenominational Christian groups.

Muslim communities include Sunni, Ahmadiyya, Shia, and Sufi (Tijaniyah and Qadiriyya orders).

Many individuals who identify as Christian or Muslim also adhere to some aspects of indigenous beliefs. There are syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a belief system unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. Christians reside throughout the country; the majority of Muslims reside in the northern regions and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi-Takoradi; and the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs reside in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice any religion and manifest such practice. These rights may be limited for stipulated reasons, which include “restrictions that are reasonably required in the interest of defense, public safety, public health or the running of essential services, on the movement or residence within Ghana of any person or persons generally, or any class of persons.”

Religious groups must register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration requirement for religious groups is the same as for nongovernmental organizations. In order to

register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee. Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

According to the law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities.

The Ministry of Education includes compulsory religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. There is no provision to opt out of these courses, which incorporate perspectives from Islam and Christianity. There is also an Islamic education unit within the ministry responsible for coordinating all public education activities for Muslim communities. The Ministry of Education permits private religious schools; however, they must follow the prescribed curriculum set by the ministry. International schools are exempt from these requirements.

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

Government Practices

Muslim leaders continued to report that some publicly funded Christian mission schools required female Muslim students to remove their hijabs and required Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting these practices. For example, Muslim leaders reported that Wesley Girls Senior High School in Cape Coast required Muslim students to participate in church services, saying they were compulsory school gatherings. Similarly, there were continued reports that some publicly funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear the hijab. There were reports that nursing students were either pressured or ordered to remove their hijabs due to uniform requirements, for example, at Krobo Nursing Training College in Techiman.

Government officials leading meetings, receptions, and state funerals offered Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. The president and vice president continued to emphasize the importance of peaceful religious coexistence in public remarks. For example, in March the media reported President Nana Akufo-Addo said, “Let us continue to stay as one different people, different religion, and different beliefs but united as Ghanaians and united in our

vision of developing our country as a free, prosperous nation that is governed according to the rule of law and where human rights are respected.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslim and Christian leaders reported continued regular dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council, an independent, statutory institution with religious reconciliation as part of its mandate. In May the media reported that a representative of the national chief imam emphasized the importance of fostering interfaith communication in an event in Wa focused on religious tolerance. In September a cross section of religious leaders from the Upper West Region inaugurated the Wa Christian-Muslim Dialogue Committee as a forum to mitigate conflict and promote interfaith understanding. Traditional leaders emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in their public statements. For example, the media reported the paramount chief of Asante Asokore highlighted the importance of religious freedom in remarks in March, noting that religious intolerance fostered sectarian conflict and instability.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy representatives discussed with officials from the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, and the Ghana Education Service the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy urged the government to restart dialogue with religious communities regarding concerns about religious accommodations in publicly funded, religiously affiliated schools. Embassy officials also discussed these subjects with a broad range of other actors, including Muslim civil society organizations and Christian groups.

In June the Ambassador hosted an iftar with religious leaders from various faiths during which he emphasized the importance of nurturing interfaith understanding and protecting religious freedom as foundations of peace and security.