

CHAD 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution 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 media stated that enforcement of the ban was difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. 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.

On National Prayer Day, December 2, 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 necessity of peaceful coexistence.

The U.S. Charge d’Affaires hosted an iftar on May 30 for religious leaders, including Muslim, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Baha’i representatives, and government officials. Participants discussed religious freedom and tolerance in the country. During the year, the Charge and other U.S. embassy representatives maintained a dialogue with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders on religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 16.3 million (midyear 2019 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 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, and indigenous religions are often practiced to some degree along with Islam and Christianity.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution 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 constitution requires an oath of office for ministers “according to the denominational formula stated by the law.” The law states that directors and secretaries general and above must take an oath under “under God” or “under Allah.”

Under the law, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralized Territorial Collectivities. 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 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 (\$86 to \$860). 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 reportedly is not 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, and there are numerous schools operated by Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants.

The government-created HCIA continues to oversee Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums. The government approves those nominated by members of the HCIA to serve on the council. 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 and Decentralized Territorial Collectivities 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 of 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 Sunna; however, enforcement was difficult, according to civil rights organizations, and adherents continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. They also continued to receive revenue through their leaders or from individuals, according to media.

The government continued to require ministers and some government officials, including deans of universities and senior civil servants, to take an oath of office on a religious text. Civil society and religious groups continued to express concern about the oath of office, some on grounds it was contrary to the secular nature of the state and others because they said it excluded Christians. Some Christian groups reportedly began a petition to have the oath requirement removed from the constitution, according to media reports. In April the EEMET hosted a conference to explain its opposition to the oath of office. The organization said the oath directly contradicted the article of the constitution affirming the country as a secular state, and also the article assuring “equality before the law without distinction as to origin, race, gender, religion, public opinion, or social position.”

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, which continued throughout the year, and to advocate for continued additional security in places of worship. There were no reports of terrorist attacks against places of worship, although police continued to provide security during ceremonies.

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

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other’s major ceremonies, celebrations, and inaugurations of community leaders and underlined the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in public statements. In December at the National Day of Prayer, Grand Imam and HCIA President Sheikh Mahamat Khatir Issa stressed the role of religious leaders in maintaining and promoting peace in the country. EEMET, the largest Protestant association in the country, said in statements to media in December that interfaith cooperation was important and that it appreciated efforts by HCIA leaders to promote interfaith dialogue. Archbishop of N’Djamena Edmond Djitangar Goetbe said there was an openness to dialogue among all faith groups but the country’s Regional Forum on

Interfaith Dialogue did not live up to its potential due to its weak organizational structure.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires met with Ministry of Territorial Administration officials and discussed shared support to maintain the country’s religiously diverse space for dialogue and coexistence.

The Charge d’Affaires 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. Embassy officials continued to discuss religious tolerance with imams during meetings and in training sessions and workshops

The Charge d’Affaires hosted an iftar on May 30, attended by 70 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.

Embassy officials continued to discuss religious tolerance with imams during meetings and in training sessions and workshops. The leader of a prominent U.S. Muslim organization invited to the country by the embassy addressed local audiences about tolerance and religious freedom. The embassy used social media platforms to highlight activities and amplify messages promoting religious freedom and tolerance.