

GUINEA 2019 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 General of Religious Affairs (SRA) continued to issue 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. In June the SRA sanctioned an imam for leading prayers in a local language rather than Arabic, suspending him indefinitely from conducting any religious activity in the country. The government tried and convicted 13 individuals for the 2018 killing of a Saudi imam. Only one was present in the courtroom; the other 12 fled the country and were tried in absentia.

In March armed individuals attacked an evangelical Protestant church in the Conakry borough of Ratoma during prayer time, where they stole equipment and subsequently burned the church. The area had been the site of an eviction operation in preparation for an urban renewal project. Police later arrested several suspects. The pastor, Salifou Kamara, asked the government to help him and the congregation find a site for a new church.

On multiple occasions, the U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met with the secretary general of religious affairs and the Grand Imam of Conakry to discuss religious tolerance, reconciliation, and social cohesion among religious groups. The U.S. government sponsored workshops for religious leaders from around the country to discuss their roles as change agents and in fostering social cohesion and tolerance. A senior embassy officer hosted an iftar with senior Muslim leaders from throughout the country, conveying the importance of religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 12.2 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the SRA, approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Much of the Muslim and Christian population incorporates indigenous rituals into their religious practices. Muslims are generally Sunni; Sufism is also present.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and several evangelical groups. There is also a small Baha'i community, in addition to 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 concentrated in large cities, including Conakry, 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 (\$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 officially recognized. Every six months, each registered religious group must present a report of its activities to the government. Registering with the government entitles religious groups to an exemption from the value-added tax (VAT) on incoming shipments and makes them eligible for 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 their 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. Many parents send their children to Quranic schools either in addition to primary school or as their primary form of education.

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 secretary general of religious affairs appoints 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

On June 2, Imam Nanfo Ismael Diaby led prayer at a mosque in Kankan, Upper Guinea, in Malinke, a local language. According to press reports, several Muslim leaders said Diaby had violated Islamic law by praying in a language other than Arabic, and at least one imam reportedly threatened to kill him. On June 10, the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs sanctioned Diaby and suspended him indefinitely from conducting any religious activity in the country.

The SRA continued to issue guidance outlining themes for discussion during 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 messages 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. Deviations from approved guidance were often reported in various sermons at mosques and other Islamic events, but the SRA said it had difficulty imposing disciplinary sanctions. In October media reported the SRA sanctioned a Conakry imam, El Hadj Yaya Camara of Ratoma, for “serious misconduct.” The SRA removed him from office and forbade him to speak publicly of Islam throughout the territory of the country.

In partnership with the UN Population Fund, the government continued a project that began in late 2018 to prevent radicalization and extreme violence in the country's at-risk areas, with a focus on Quranic schools and Franco-Arabic schools. The government organized a series of workshops throughout the country with religious leaders, teachers, students at Quranic schools, Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society to discuss regulation of such schools and to sensitize communities to the signs and dangers of radicalization and violent extremism.

In April the court of Kankan sentenced 13 persons to 30 years to life in prison for the January 2018 killing of a Saudi imam in Mandiana, Upper Guinea. All but one of the defendants fled the country and were tried in absentia.

Saudi Arabia's annual quota of Hajj pilgrims from the country remained at 9,000 persons. The SRA organized the logistics, subsidized and facilitated the travel of 8,300 pilgrims, and fixed the year's individual pilgrimage fare at 43 million Guinean francs (\$4,600), with those who previously made the pilgrimage in the past five years paying 48 million Guinean francs (\$5,100) to cover additional fees charged by Saudi Arabia.

The government continued to subsidize the travel of Christians to pilgrimages in the Holy Land, Greece, and Italy.

According to the SRA, several unregistered religious groups operated freely. The small Jehovah's Witnesses community reportedly proselytized from house to house without interference, although neither it nor the Baha'i community requested official recognition. Some groups stated they preferred not to have a formal relationship with the SRA.

Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses said the religious group had official recognition from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization under regulations for registering associations and NGOs, which must be renewed annually. The Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said they sent annual reports of their activities to the SRA as well as to the ministry.

Islamic schools were prevalent throughout the country and remained 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 in Conakry and other large

cities accepted students of all religious groups. They taught the compulsory curriculum but did not receive government support, and they 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. The government permitted religious broadcasting on privately owned commercial radio and encouraged equal time for Christian and Muslim groups.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In March armed individuals attacked an evangelical Protestant church in the Conakry borough of Ratoma during prayer time, where they stole equipment and subsequently burned the church. The area was the site of an eviction operation in preparation for an urban renewal project. Police later arrested several suspects. The pastor, Salifou Kamara, asked the government to help him and the congregation find a site for a new church.

In parts of the country including the middle and upper regions, particularly strong familial, communal, cultural, social, or economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam, according to observers.

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 nor required 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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy officials met several times with the secretary general of religious affairs and the Grand Imam of Conakry to discuss religious tolerance. Embassy officials also met with the assistant to the secretary general of religious affairs on multiple occasions, emphasizing religious tolerance and reconciliation among religious groups. The Grand Imam of Conakry and the

Archbishop of Conakry participated in U.S.-funded workshops to promote religious tolerance. The workshops were part of a larger project focusing on social cohesion and transitional justice, in which religious tolerance and religious leaders played a key role.

A senior embassy official hosted an iftar with senior Muslim leaders from throughout the country, conveying the importance of religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Embassy officials consulted closely and advocated for religious tolerance with religious leaders, including the grand imams of Conakry, Kankan, Sigui, and Labe; Catholic and Anglican bishops; and other Muslim and Christian clergy. Embassy officials also participated in several iftar celebrations nationwide to promote good relations and mutual understanding among religious groups and to relay a message of respect for religious freedom and national reconciliation.