

# CHAD 2016 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 Salafist association but anecdotal evidence suggested enforcement of this ban proved difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques. Senior government officials, including the president, promoted religious tolerance in their public statements.

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for security in places of worship. Religious leaders, including the secretary of the Chadian churches and evangelical mission for harmony, the vice president of the Catholic Church’s Episcopal Conference of Chad, and the High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) publicly stated they supported the president’s statements advocating religious tolerance. In May a group that included foreign government officials and representatives from both the Sufi and Salafi communities met in N’Djamena to examine the state of relations between the two communities. The group concluded that intra-Muslim tensions were high and expressed concern about the absence of a Salafi representative in the HCIA.

The Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights visited the country in October to discuss strategies for combating violent extremism with the president and other government officials. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom, met regularly with religious leaders, and supported outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for religious leaders, including Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and Bahai representatives and government officials, during which participants discussed religious freedom and tolerance.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Second General Population Census (2009), approximately 58 percent of the population is Muslim, 18 percent Roman Catholic, 16 percent

Protestant, and the remaining 8 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs. 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 Bahais 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 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 only be limited by law 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.

Under the law, all associations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Planning, Urban Development, and Housing. The associations must provide a list of all the founding members and their positions in the organization, the founders' resumes, copies of the founders' identification cards, minutes of the establishment meetings, a letter to the minister requesting registration, the principal source of the organization's revenue, the address of the organization, a copy of the rules and procedures, and the statutory documents of the organization. The Ministry of Public Security and Immigration conducts background checks on every founding member and establishes a six-month temporary but renewable authorization to operate, pending the final authorization and approval. Failure to register with the ministry may lead to the banning of a group, one month to a year in prison, and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$80 to \$804). Organizations that fail to register are not considered legal entities and may not open a bank account or enter into contracts. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

Burqas, defined in a ministerial notice as a burqa, or any other garment where one sees only the eyes, are forbidden in the entire national territory by ministerial decree.

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 High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) oversees Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic-language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums. The Salafi community is not a party to the council. 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.

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 Planning, Urban Development, and Housing 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 government board that oversees the distribution of oil revenues, Muslim and Christian leaders share a rotational position on the board.

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

### **Government Practices**

The government maintained its ban on the leading Salafist association but anecdotal evidence suggested that enforcement of this ban proved difficult. Those practicing this interpretation of Islam continued to meet and worship in their own mosques.

On July 6, during a speech marking the Eid al-Fitr Muslim holiday at the end of Ramadan, Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Pakacke stated that religious leaders of different faiths, through their prayers and actions, were the cornerstone of the

country's peace. Religious leaders of various faiths, diplomats, and other officials all attended the speech. The prime minister called on religious leaders to intensify interreligious dialogue and to continue to raise awareness about what he termed the trap of religious extremism. The prime minister congratulated young people who helped secure places of worship by using their own funds to purchase metal detectors, participating in interfaith vigilance committees, monitoring perimeters, and sometimes searching individuals entering places of worship to ensure that people could worship safely. On several occasions, Muslims and Christians coordinated this security jointly.

President Idriss Deby Itno encouraged religious tolerance in public statements and urged religious leaders to promote peaceful relations among religious groups. During the celebration of Eid al-Adha in September, political and religious authorities called on all religious groups to coexist peacefully and promote national unity. The president remarked, "The interreligious dialogue which has already proved its worth must be maintained on a permanent and lasting basis." During a December 14 meeting with members of the Episcopal Conference, The president reiterated his appreciation of the religious leaders' efforts for peaceful cohabitation in the country. He encouraged them to continue building a foundation of peace among different religious groups.

On April 23, the Episcopal Conference of Chad (CET) dedicated a new headquarters building constructed with financial support from the government. The structure centralized the CET's various organizations working in the service of education, health, justice, peace, and rural development. On October 15, the prime minister, accompanied by several cabinet members, represented the president at Catholic Archbishop Edmond Djitangar's installation ceremony.

The government conducted a long running public education campaign in the national media to inform people of the burqa ban; however, during the year there were no known prosecutions for violating this ban.

The government generally did not fund construction or maintenance of places of worship. The government offered, however, to contribute partial funding towards the construction of the country's first Catholic basilica, as well as restoration of the Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral in N'Djamena. Both construction projects remained incomplete at the end of the year.

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

In May a group that included foreign government officials and representatives of Sufi and Salafi Islamic traditions met in N'Djamena to examine the state of relations between the Sufi and Salafi communities. The group concluded that intra-Muslim tensions in the country were high, pointing to the absence of a Salafi representative in the HCIA as a particular concern.

Religious leaders, including the secretary of the Chadian Churches and Evangelical Mission for Harmony, the vice president of the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference of Chad, and the HCIA publicly stated they supported the president's statements advocating religious tolerance.

Religious leaders continued to raise awareness of the risks of terrorist attacks and to advocate for security in places of worship. In July during Eid al-Fitr, the imam of the Great Mosque of Am-Djarass stated, "Anyone who kills in the name of Islam is a disbeliever. Islam is far from these barbaric acts."

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, comprising representatives of evangelical Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, met three times during the year to promote religious tolerance and combat prejudice.

On July 6, during Ramadan, members of the HCIA discussed the country's socio-economic challenges, peaceful interreligious coexistence, and global terrorism. They pledged to support the government in the fight against religious extremism, and made speeches explaining the purpose of the burqa ban. The HCIA and Radio al-Quoran used positive messaging to strengthen communities and counter religious extremism.

In October local Roman Catholic bishops called for "a new Chad," committing the Church to supporting development, education, health care, and national reconciliation, with particular emphasis on Christian unity and interreligious dialogue. They denounced corruption and mismanagement of land resources, advocated for reform of international donor cooperation, and reminded government authorities and citizens about the value of education.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other's ceremonies and celebrations. For example, Christians regularly attended iftars celebrating Muslim holidays, and in October, several imams attended the installation of the new Catholic Archbishop of N'Djamena.

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

The Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights visited the country in October to discuss strategies for combating violent religious extremism with the president and other government officials. She also met with staff at Radio al-Quoran and imams from the HCIA.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives met with N'Djamena's grand imam and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom and tolerance and to discuss efforts to counter extremist messages. The Ambassador attended events of the Union of Quranic Schools, including the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The Ambassador hosted an iftar attended by more than 40 religious leaders, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Bahai representatives, and government officials. At the iftar, attendees discussed religious freedom and tolerance in the country. Embassy officials met regularly with imams in training sessions and workshops to promote tolerance and human rights.

The U.S. government provided funding to the nongovernmental organization Equal Access, which worked with religious leaders of all faiths to promote moderate messaging on community radio stations. For example, Equal Access created and promoted moderate content for programming on Muslim radio stations.