

# GHANA 2016 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 reported some publicly-funded Christian mission schools forced female Muslim students to remove their hijab and forced Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting these practices. There were reports some publicly-funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear the hijab. There were reports that administrators at some hospitals did not allow Muslim staff members to wear the hijab in spite of Ministry of Health guidance barring this practice.

Muslim and Christian leaders reported cordial relations among the country's main religious communities, facilitated through regular dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council. For example, in October the Presbyterian Interfaith Research and Resource Center sponsored a large interfaith gathering to discuss cooperation in promoting peaceful coexistence. In August at an Ahmadiyya gathering in the United Kingdom, the national chief imam praised Ahmadi Muslim contributions to the country and stressed the importance of harmony among Muslim communities.

The U.S. embassy engaged with government officials to emphasize the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders and community organizations and sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. In August the Ambassador presented the embassy's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. award to National Chief Imam Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu in recognition of his commitment to promoting peace, mutual understanding, and harmony within Muslim communities and with other religious groups.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 26.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010 government census, approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim, 5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6 percent belongs to other religious groups or has no religious beliefs. Other

religious groups include the Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist, 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 charismatic religious groups.

Muslim communities include Sunni, Ahmadiyya, Tijaniyah and Qadiriyya orders of Sufism, and Shia.

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 practice 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 live throughout the country; the majority of Muslims resides in the northern regions and in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa; and the majority of the followers of traditional religious beliefs resides 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 other 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 and nonreligious 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 reported some publicly-funded Christian mission schools forced female Muslim students to remove their hijabs and forced Muslim students to participate in Christian worship services, despite a Ministry of Education directive prohibiting these practices. Similarly, there were reports some publicly-funded Muslim mission schools required female Christian students to wear the hijab.

There were reports that administrators at some hospitals did not allow Muslim staff members to wear the hijab in spite of Ministry of Health guidance barring this practice. For example, a nurse in the Ashanti region reported her superiors threatened termination if she refused to remove her hijab.

Government officials leading meetings, receptions, and state funerals offered Christian and Muslim prayers and occasionally traditional invocations. The president and vice president continued to make public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence.

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

Muslim and Christian leaders reported cordial relations among the country's religious communities, facilitated through regular dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council, an independent, statutory institution with religious reconciliation as part of its mandate. For example, in October the Presbyterian Interfaith Research and Resource Center sponsored a large interfaith gathering. Attendees included Minister of the Interior Prosper Bani, Christian Council General Secretary Reverend Dr. Kwabena Opuni Frimpong, and Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission of Ghana General Secretary Alhaji Ahmad Suleman Anderson. The participants discussed the roles religious actors could play in promoting peaceful elections and peaceful coexistence and civic engagement of religious communities. In August at an Ahmadiyya gathering in the United Kingdom, the national chief imam praised Ahmadiyya contributions to the country and stressed the importance of harmony among Muslim communities.

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

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed with government officials the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. The embassy also discussed these subjects with a broad range of other actors, including Muslim civil society organizations and Christian groups.

In July the Ambassador hosted an iftar with National Chief Imam Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu and other religious leaders from various faiths. The event emphasized inclusion regardless of faith, gender, and ethnicity; religious tolerance; and freedom of expression.

In August the Ambassador presented the embassy's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. award to National Chief Imam Sharubutu in recognition of his commitment to promoting peace, mutual understanding, and harmony within Muslim communities and with other religious groups. The award ceremony emphasized the importance of interfaith understanding and included participation from a wide range of religious leaders from various faiths.

In October the embassy sponsored a two-day capacity-building workshop in Accra for 100 young Muslim leaders aged 25-35 representing each region of the country. The workshop promoted interfaith cooperation among the younger generation.