

# **TOGO 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution specifies the state is secular and protects the rights of all citizens to exercise their religious beliefs, consistent with the nation's laws. Religious groups other than Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims must register with the government. The government again did not approve any pending registration applications from religious groups, nor did it accept new applications; approximately 900 remained pending at year's end. The Ministry of Territorial Affairs (MTA) continued to organize meetings with religious leaders and communities to discuss pending draft legislation regarding religious freedom.

Noise caused by religious celebrations or competition for parishioners among churches caused occasional disputes among religious groups. The Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA reported 40 complaints, almost all regarding noise, during the year. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common.

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA and religious leaders throughout the year to discuss religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.9 million (July 2017 estimate). According to a 2004 estimate by the University of Lome, the most recent data available, the population is 48 percent Christian, 33 percent traditional animist, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, and 5 percent followers of other religions. Roman Catholics are the largest Christian group at 28 percent of the total population, followed by Protestants at 10 percent, and other Christian denominations totaling 10 percent. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, the Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists, and other Christians include members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The 5 percent representing "other religions" includes Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Bahais, Hindus, and persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious practices. Reliable figures are difficult to obtain due to migration.

Christians live mainly in the southern part of the country, while Muslim populations are predominately in the central and northern regions.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution states the nation is a secular state and ensures equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of religion, respects all religious beliefs, and prohibits religious discrimination. It provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship, the free exercise of religious belief, and the right of religious groups to organize themselves and carry out their activities consistent with the law, the rights of others, and public order.

The law does not recognize specific religions, but the government in practice recognizes Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam with their religious holidays observed as national holidays and religious leaders of these groups invited to government events. The law requires all other religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Official recognition as a religious association provides these groups the same rights as those afforded to the three recognized religions, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registering is not obligatory, but unregistered groups do not receive import duty exemptions or additional government benefits such as government-provided teachers for private schools.

Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA. A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, its leaders' religious credentials, a site use agreement and map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$270). Criteria for recognition include the authenticity of the religious leader's diploma and the government's assessment of the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Directorate of Religious Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition for religious groups applying for registration. The investigation and issuance of formal written authorization usually takes several years.

By law, religious groups must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those likely to block city streets or involve loud ceremonies in residential areas.

The public school curriculum does not include religion classes. There are many Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools, to which the government assigns its own paid employees as additional teachers and staff. Other registered religious groups have the right to establish schools as long as they meet accreditation standards.

The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. The law forbids private religious radio stations from broadcasting political material.

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

### **Government Practices**

On October 16, security forces arrested Imam Djobo Mohamed Alhassan, an advisor to the head of an opposition party, for inciting persons to violence during a sermon. The incident, in the country's second largest city, led to violence perpetrated by both supporters and opponents of the imam. The Togolese Catholic Bishops Council issued a statement deploring the violence, including the reported vandalizing of a mosque. Most observers considered the arrest and its consequences were politically motivated.

Similar to the previous year, the MTA stated it did not approve pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because draft legislation regarding religious freedom had not passed. The MTA continued to organize meetings with religious leaders and communities to discuss the draft legislation, with the last meeting held in August. As of the end of the year there were approximately 900 applications pending at the MTA.

While unregistered religious groups continued to be able to conduct religious activities while awaiting registration, the MTA reported that religious groups faced obstacles such as obtaining building permits for places of worship. The ministry continued to state, however, this was not because they were religious groups but because applying for a building permit required at least a six-month waiting period for any applicant. Observers reported that officials routinely granted religious groups' requests for permission to conduct nighttime celebrations.

The government invited only Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders to government events. The government invited the three groups to conduct worship at important national events, such as the independence celebration on April 27.

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

According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA, disputes continued to occur when new churches established themselves in neighborhoods, particularly those led by religious leaders from Nigeria. Local residents continued to state some of these congregations worshiped too loudly and often late at night, using drums. The MTA received 40 complaints during the year, nearly all regarding noise, and the ministry stated it sought to resolve them. These complaints reportedly often focused on evangelical Protestant congregations, led by charismatic leaders who presided over services employing musical instruments and loud praying.

Members of different religious groups continued to invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Marriage between persons of different religious groups remained common.

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

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to discuss religious toleration and countering extremist messaging. The Ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, traditional chiefs, and civil society organizations. For example, after violent demonstrations in October, the Ambassador met with both government and religious officials to facilitate dialogue and peaceful resolution, which was followed by a marked decrease in extreme rhetoric.