

TOGO 2020 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 did not pass draft legislation pending since 2018 that detailed regulations regarding religious groups and did not authorize new religious groups; approximately 900 registration applications from religious groups remained pending at year's end, the same as in previous years, and the government continued not to accept new applications. According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) in the Ministry of Territorial Affairs (MTA), however, the government did not prevent these groups from opening new religious institutions and carrying out their activities informally.

Members of different religious groups attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious tolerance with government officials in meetings conducted virtually and met with religious leaders throughout the year to discuss their efforts to reduce tensions in communities and support peace and social cohesion, specifically regarding countering violent extremism related to religion. The embassy continued to promote interreligious dialogue through grants. Additionally, the embassy supported a workshop for English teachers in Islamic schools on introducing religious tolerance into lesson plans.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.6 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to a 2009 estimate by the University of Lome, the most recent data available, the population is 43.7 percent Christian, 35.6 percent traditional animist, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, and 5 percent followers of other religious groups. 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 5.7 percent. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. Other Christians include members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups include Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Baha'is, and Hindus. There are

also persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious and voodoo practices.

Christians live mainly in the south, while Muslims are predominately in the central and northern regions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is a secular state, provides for equality before the law for all citizens regardless of religion, protects all religious beliefs, and prohibits religious discrimination. The constitution also provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship; 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 requires all religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations, except for Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. Some Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic holidays are observed as national holidays. Official recognition as a religious association provides other groups the same rights as those afforded to Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registering is not obligatory, but registration entitles religious groups to receive government benefits such as government-provided teachers for private schools and special assistance in case of natural disasters.

Organizations apply for registration with the DRA, which is part of the MTA. A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, leaders' religious credentials, a site-use agreement, map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$280). Criteria for recognition include 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 DRA 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

The government continued to meet with religious leaders throughout the year. The MTA said it met with religious leaders prior to the February 22 presidential election to discuss their role in a peaceful election process. They also met to discuss the suspension and later partial resumption of religious services during the state of emergency imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to previous years, the government did not act on approximately 900 pending registration applications from religious groups or accept new applications. According to the DRA, however, the government did not prevent these groups from opening new religious institutions and carrying out their activities informally. The cabinet did not act on a bill submitted to it by the MTA in July 2019 and pending since 2018 detailing the process for opening places of worship and regulating hours of operation and levels of noise allowed during worship. According to the MTA, registrations and passage of the bill were delayed due to the presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government said it received 10 noise complaints, all prior to the April state of emergency restricting large gatherings.

The government imposed city-wide curfews in a few Muslim-majority cities due to outbreaks of COVID-19 linked to Eid-al-Adha celebrations in late July.

In response to concerns expressed by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in 2019 regarding increased police presence in Muslim majority areas of Lome, the

Vice President of the Muslim Union said Muslims were not unfairly targeted by increased police presence and that it prevented vandalism and crime.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to religious leaders, noise complaints remained a problem during religious practices.

Members of Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim 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

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom and tolerance in meetings conducted virtually with government officials, in particular pending legislation and registration applications. Embassy officials also met with religious leaders and discussed their efforts to reduce tensions in communities and support peace and social cohesion, specifically regarding countering violent extremism related to religion. In September, the embassy issued a \$250,000 grant to an NGO to strengthen resilience to violent extremism, with a strong focus on interreligious dialogue.

In January, the embassy supported a workshop that focused on introducing religious tolerance in lesson plans for 22 English teachers in Islamic schools in Kara, a city approximately 250 miles north of Lome.