

CHAD 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates separation of religion and state and provides for freedom of religion and equality before the law without distinction as to religion. It prohibits “denominational propaganda” that inhibits national unity. Citing security reasons, the prime minister banned burqas after a suicide bombing in N’Djamena on June 15. The president made public statements promoting religious tolerance.

Christian and Islamic leaders made statements supporting the burqa ban. Christian and Islamic groups comprising the Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue held their sixth annual day of prayer and pardon, which aimed to encourage interfaith collaboration and reduce violence, and met several times to promote religious tolerance. Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders continued joint efforts to advocate religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence with refugees and returnees from the Central African Republic.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom with the government. The embassy also maintained a dialogue with religious leaders and continued outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for religious leaders, including Christians and government officials, during which participants discussed religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.6 million (July 2015 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. Slightly more than half of Christians are Roman Catholic. 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; however, religious distribution is mixed in urban areas.

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Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

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 to respect the rights of others and for the “imperative” of safeguarding public order and good morals. The constitution declares a secular state and provides for separation of religion and state. 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 the Interior and Public Security. 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 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 (\$83 to \$830). Organizations that fail to register are not considered legal entities and cannot open a bank account or enter into contracts. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

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 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 compulsory military service, however.

The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security oversees religious matters. The office is responsible for mediating intercommunal conflict, reporting on religious practices, coordinating religious pilgrimages, and ensuring religious freedom.

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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.

Government Practices

According to international reports, following an earlier ban, on October 15, the government arrested 62 women for wearing burqas. The women were fined 100,000 CFA (\$166) and released, although authorities said they would be charged with complicity if arrested again.

After the June 15 attack in N'Djamena by a Boko Haram bomber dressed in a burqa, Prime Minister Kalzeube Payimi Deubet met religious leaders to inform them of measures the government took in response, in particular, banning the burqa. The prime minister informed religious leaders that “wearing a burqa is strictly forbidden in the entire national territory,” and he asked religious leaders to educate their followers on the measures taken by the government. According to local media, religious leaders from the Muslim community, Catholic Church, and evangelical churches made statements supporting the prime minister and said they would raise awareness and explain the importance of the burqa ban.

On July 13, Minister of Territorial Administration and Public Safety Abderahim Bireme Hamid stated to religious leaders and the United Nations agencies that the banning of the burqa was among a series of measures being taken in the fight against terrorism. Abderahim urged religious leaders to “educate their followers” regarding measures banning the wearing of face-covering clothing. The minister emphasized the need for collaboration with security forces in the fight against Boko Haram and said, “the followers of this sect are not only foreigners, but also some of our citizens, blindly enlisted for sadistic purposes.” According to local reports, religious leaders agreed with the government that wearing the burqa was a source of insecurity, because this dress created camouflage.

During a July 18 meeting in Amdjarass, Ennedi-East Region, President Idriss Deby Itno told religious, administrative, and traditional authorities, including 10 members of the local Higher Council of Islamic Affairs led by Sheikh Oumar Khamis, that wearing the burqa was prohibited throughout the country. He urged the religious leaders to raise awareness of this decision and the government’s reasons for it. The president emphasized in particular what he said was the need for peaceful coexistence of all citizens. “You have to educate, guide, direct your

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faithful in the sense of coexistence. Christians and Muslims should live in harmony,” the president said.

On March 3, the minister for territorial administration and public security issued a decree dissolving the Ansar al Sunna Almouhamaddya association, which reportedly promoted Wahhabism, citing it as a risk to public security.

President 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-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, he urged each religious group to advocate for harmony among all citizens. The president also commended what he said were amicable relations and understanding prevailing among leaders of the various religious denominations. He encouraged religious groups to strengthen their ties, which he said constituted the bedrock of national unity.

On December 12, President Deby Itno presided over the sixth annual National Day of Peace, Peaceful Cohabitation, and National Concord of the Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue and delivered remarks highlighting the peaceful coexistence among religious communities which he said existed in the country. He promised continued government support to the religious community for peace-building efforts.

The government-created High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) oversaw Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic-language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represented the country at international Islamic forums. The grand imam, who was also the President of the HCIA, oversaw each region’s grand imam and had the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and control activities of Islamic charities.

The government continued funding the construction of the country’s first Catholic basilica, as well as restoration of the Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral in N’Djamena.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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.

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

In his Eid al-Adha sermon, Imam Ahmat Mahamat Annour Al-Helou, Mufti of Chad, urged Muslims to behave responsibly, to show solidarity and tolerance, and preach peace and unity everywhere in the country. He said, “a Muslim should be exemplary because Islam is essentially peace. So the Muslim must be a person of peace, a social educator and not a suicide bomber.” In addition, he welcomed what he termed were the efforts of the government to effectively fight against Boko Haram.

Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders continued joint efforts to advocate religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence to refugees and returnees from the Central African Republic.

Muslims and Christians commonly attended each other’s ceremonies and celebrations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives regularly met with government officials to discuss efforts to counter extremist religious messages and promote religious tolerance. The embassy promoted religious tolerance through diplomatic engagement and outreach, including visits, workshops, and cultural programs. The Ambassador and embassy officials met frequently with the grand imam and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom and discuss issues such as the burqa ban.

The Ambassador hosted an iftar attended by more than 40 religious leaders, including Christians, and government officials. Embassy officials and invitees discussed religious freedom and tolerance in the country.