

CHAD 2017 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 continued to suggest enforcement of the ban was 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. In a June speech, President Idriss Deby warned intra-Muslim tensions in the country were not good for peaceful cohabitation and could lead to violent extremism.

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 Archbishop of the Catholic Church of Chad, and the High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) publicly stated they supported the president’s statements advocating religious tolerance.

The U.S. Ambassador hosted an iftar for religious leaders, including Muslim, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Bahai representatives, and government officials. Participants discussed religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador and other embassy representatives maintained a dialogue on religious freedom, met regularly with religious leaders, and supported outreach programs with Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 12.1 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the most recent census, in 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 final authorization and approval. Failure to register with the ministry means that organizations are not considered legal entities and may not open a bank account or enter into contracts; it may also 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 (\$88 to \$880). Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits.

Burqas, defined by ministerial notice as any garment where one sees only the eyes, are forbidden in the entire national territory by ministerial decree. This also applies to *niqabs*.

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. Wahabbists are not officially represented on the council and are banned by the government. 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 position is held for three years and may be renewed only once.

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

Government Practices

The government maintained its ban on the leading Wahabbist group; however, those practicing continued to meet and worship in their own mosques.

The government continued its long running public education campaign in the national media to inform individuals of the burqa ban. During the year, there were no known prosecutions for violating the ban.

In June during the celebration of the end of Ramadan, President Deby stated that all mosques should affiliate with the HCIA and that the HCIA would have oversight over all Muslim activities. Institutions that did not comply could face closure.

The government continued to deploy security forces around both Muslim and Christian places of worship, notably on Fridays around mosques and Sundays around churches, as well as other occasions for religious events.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In a June speech, President Deby warned that intra-Muslim tensions in the country were not good for peaceful cohabitation and could lead to violent extremism. The statement further referenced a 2016 government-endorsed fact-finding mission that concluded that intra-Muslim tensions in the country were high, pointing to the absence of a Salafi representative on the HCIA as a particular concern.

In September Moussa Nguedmbaye was stabbed to death in the Al Rahman mosque in N'Djamena. Media reported that the victim, who was a Sufi, had a conflict with the Wahabbi members of the mosque before he was killed. One media outlet stated that the imam of the mosque ordered the killing. There were no arrests at year's end.

During the National Day of Prayer and Peaceful Interreligious Coexistence, held on November 28, religious leaders, including the Secretary of the Chadian Churches and Evangelical Mission for Harmony, the Archbishop of the N'Djamena, 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 continued additional security in places of worship.

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, comprising representatives of evangelical Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, met in February in N'Djamena to promote religious tolerance and combat prejudice. They publicly reiterated their commitment to educate their respective groups on the necessity of peaceful cohabitation.

On June 6, during Ramadan, members of the HCIA discussed the country's socioeconomic 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 Koran al-Karim used positive messaging to strengthen communities and counter religious extremism. The HCIA continued to use the

same messages throughout the year to raise awareness to counter religious extremism.

Catholic Archbishop of N’Djamena Edmond Jitangar began seeking funds from nongovernment sources for reconstruction of the Catholic cathedral in N’Djamena, which was damaged in 1980 during the country’s civil war. In August he noted, “it is not the role of the state to construct a cathedral, because we are in a secular state,” and expressed his belief that reconstruction would symbolize the peaceful coexistence of religion in the country, as the cathedral is located just a few yards from the Malik Faycal Mosque.

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador hosted an iftar attended by more than 60 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 Ambassador and other embassy representatives met with the grand imam, and with Catholic and Protestant leaders to monitor and promote religious freedom and tolerance, as well as to discuss efforts to counter extremist messages.

In September the U.S. government provided additional funding and continued support to the nongovernmental organization Equal Access, which worked with religious leaders of all faiths to promote moderate messaging on community radio stations. Additionally, in July the U.S. Ambassador gave a speech at the inauguration of a U.S. government-funded community radio station in Karal established to amplify moderate voices.