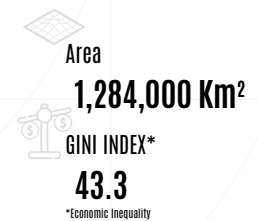
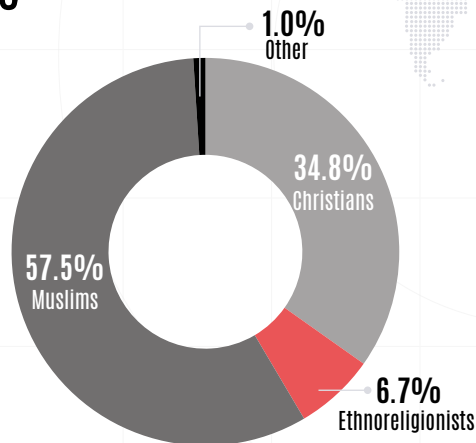




CHAD

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The National Assembly of Chad approved a revised constitution in April 2018, but the vote was boycotted by many members of the opposition.¹ The reform turns Chad into a presidential republic (eliminating the post of prime minister), and allows the incumbent president, Idriss Déby, to stay in power until 2033.

Déby has ruled the north-central African country without interruption since 1990. In the most recent presidential election in 2016, he was re-elected with nearly 60 percent of the votes.² Practically all opposition parties signed a joint declaration against him. The new constitution requires an oath for cabinet ministers. Originally, “the law stated that those sworn in must take an oath under Allah”. However, after criticism, in June 2018 “it was changed to under God or under Allah”.³ In April 2018, the Catholic bishops of Chad issued a statement opposing the constitutional reforms and calling on the government to hold a referendum on the new constitution.⁴

According to Article 1 of the 2018 constitution, the Republic of Chad is a secular state that upholds the separation of religion and state⁵. Article 14 guarantees the principle

of equality before the law without distinction of religion. The freedoms of conscience, religion, association, assembly or expression are protected. However, as Article 28 stipulates, such freedoms may be limited “for the respect of the freedoms and the rights of others and by the imperative to safeguard public order and good morals”. The constitution includes long prison sentences for members of the government who try to undermine the secularity of the state. Article 157 clearly says that infringing this principle “constitutes a crime of high treason”. Article 5 of the constitution also prohibits “any propaganda of [a] religious character tending to infringe [upon] national unity or the secularity of the State”.

Article 38 of the constitution makes education free, compulsory, and secular. Religious education is not allowed in public schools, but can be offered in private schools. Several religious groups, including the Catholic Church, have important networks of private educational establishments in the country.⁶

The government set up a High Council for Islamic Affairs of Chad, which “oversee[s] Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country at international Islamic forums.”⁷

All associations must register with the government. The Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs in the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Public Security, and Local Governance is the government department responsible for religious matters. It mediates “intercommunal conflicts, reporting on religious practices, coordinating religious pilgrimages, and ensuring religious freedom.”⁸

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Religious groups in Chad have traditionally enjoyed good relations, particularly in the south of the country. Muslims and Christians regularly attend one another’s religious celebrations and feast days. Nevertheless, several factors have undermined this peaceful coexistence in recent years, and this has affected religious freedom in the country.

Chad is divided between a predominantly Muslim north and a largely Christian and Animist south. In June 2018, the government appointed a sultan for the southern region of Moyen-Chari. The sultan is a figure of leadership and spiritual guidance for a given area. However, the post is closely associated with Islam. The appointment, which was carried out without prior consultations, caused a strong reaction among the non-Muslim population of the region, who fear that the sultan could use his position to “drive an Islamic agenda”⁹ in the area and the entire south of the country. “In a region with a large Christian and Animist population, we can’t have a chieftaincy using the terminology of a sultanate. It is a threat to the way we live together,”¹⁰ said a Christian member of the Chadian parliament.

The most important factor undermining the right to religious freedom in the country is the presence of jihadi terrorist groups, specifically Boko Haram. Established in Nigeria, this terrorist group has been operating in Chad since 2015, particularly in the Lake Chad basin, which lies near the Nigerian-Chadian border.¹¹

During the period under review, several terrorist attacks took place in different parts of the country, with the Chadian security forces as the main target. In March 2019, 23 Chadian soldiers were killed and several others wounded in a terrorist attack near Lake Chad (south-western Chad).¹² Another terrorist incident took place on 25th May, in which four soldiers and several civilians, including a journalist, were killed.¹³ On 23rd June 2019, at least six civilians died as a result of a suicide bombing in Kaiga

(Western Chad).¹⁴ In March 2020, the terrorist group conducted the deadliest attack against Chad’s security forces, killing 92 soldiers on the Boma Peninsula.¹⁵

In August 2018, the government issued new rules for northern Chad requiring government officials to swear a religious (Islam-inspired) oath in order to keep their job. Several Christian groups complained of potential discrimination in government positions.¹⁶

In February 2019, the governments of Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger launched Operation Yancin Tafki to counter jihadi terrorism in the Lake Chad region.¹⁷ The operation consists of a coordination between the Armed Forces of these four countries, and combines air and land forces.

Intercommunal violence in eastern Chad between non-Muslim and Muslim communities increased during 2019. According to the Crisis Group, “far from being the product of classic rivalries between farmers and herders, these conflicts reveal deep identity divisions and competition for land, leadership and local power in these regions”.¹⁸ The majority of the incidents occurred in the provinces of Ouaddai and Sila, next to the border with Sudan, between May and August 2019. The escalation of tensions was so intense that in August 2019, the government had to declare a state of emergency and deploy troops in two eastern regions.¹⁹ Several incidents affected religious communities during this period; for example, on 16th May 2019, six people were killed as they left a mosque.²⁰ In spite of this, the conflict does not seem to have had a religious cause, but appeared to be driven by ethnic and socioeconomic factors.

During 2020, terrorists continued to exploit what the United Nations call “ethnic animosity”, in order to kidnap, pillage and grab land.

On 21st March 2020, religious activities were suspended and places of worship were closed due to the regulations imposed by the government to contain the coronavirus outbreak.²¹ In June 2020, the Emergency Fund created by Pope Francis sent aid to the Diocese of Doba because of the hardships faced by some parishes as a result of the pandemic.²²

PROSPECTS FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Since 2015 Chad has suffered from the terrorist actions of Boko Haram; this has damaged the economy, and cre-

ated a major humanitarian crisis by displacing thousands of people.

Even though attacks have declined in recent years since, the security situation remains precarious. Furthermore, the government's highly militarised response to the threat, epitomised by Operation Yancin Tafki, has not adequately met the needs of the population. The presence of jihadi armed groups clearly undermines religious freedom in the country.

Identity-based politics in eastern Chad has fuelled local intercommunal violence.²³ To contain the problem, the government imposed a state of emergency in the area in August 2019. However, the authorities have not addressed the grievances that underpin the conflict. Although it does not appear to be driven by religion, it still has the potential of negatively impacting religious freedom.

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