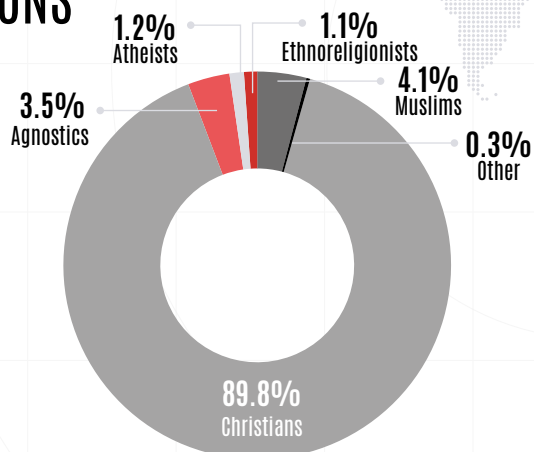




EQUATORIAL GUINEA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of Equatorial Guinea (adopted in 1995 and amended in 2012 after a referendum in 2011) guarantees freedom of religion and worship (Article 24, 4), and punishes “discrimination [. . .] on the basis of tribe, ethnicity, gender, religion, social, political or other analogous motives” (Article 15, 1).¹ Moreover, the constitutional text prohibits political party platforms based on religion: they must have “national character and scope” (Article 9, 2). Individuals are free to change religion. “Christians converting to Islam are permitted to add Muslim names to their Christian names on their official documents”.²

Concerning education, Article 24 (Section 4) of the constitution allows free choice in matters of religious instruction, based on the principle of freedom of conscience and religion.³ The constitution also guarantees the right for organisations and individuals to establish schools, on the condition of “being subject to the official pedagogical plan” (Article 24, Section 3). In public schools, the study of religion is optional and may be replaced by a civil or social education course.⁴ Several religious groups, mainly Catholics and Protestants, operate both primary and sec-

ondary schools.⁵

A 1991 law, which was incorporated into a presidential decree the following year, sets out the rules for the registration of religious groups. It also officially sanctioned preferential treatment of the country’s established churches, i.e. the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea, neither of which is required to obtain state registration.⁶ In practice, this preferential treatment is revealed by the inclusion of the Catholic Mass in all official ceremonies, particularly during celebrations of the anniversary of the 1979 coup d’état, Independence Day and the President’s Birthday.

All other religious groups are required to register by making a written request to the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs and Prisons. The evaluation of this request is entrusted to the Ministry’s director-general.⁷ Some religious groups, including Muslims and Baha’is, need to register only once. Other, newer denominations may have to periodically renew their registration. Unregistered groups can be fined or closed.⁸ Religious groups that fail to register may be subject to fines. In practice, the registration process is extremely slow – in some cases it can take years. However, this is related more to red tape than explicit political bias against a particular religious group.⁹

In October 2012, the Government of Equatorial Guinea and the Holy See signed a concordat.¹⁰ The agreement guarantees the legal personality of the Church in the country. Moreover, it covered topics such as “the canonical marriage, places of worship, educational institutions, and spiritual assistance to Catholic faithful in hospitals and prisons”.¹¹

On 4th April 2015, the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs and Prisons, published a decree regarding religious activities. It states that all religious activities taking place outside the hours of 6am to 9pm and those held in non-registered places of worship can only go ahead with permission from the ministry. The decree restricts religious acts or preaching in private homes and requires foreign religious representatives or authorities to obtain advance permission from the ministry to participate in religious activities.¹²

Many Christian celebrations such as Christmas, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Immaculate Conception are national feast days. Non-Christian festivities are not national holidays.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the reporting period, there were no significant incidents affecting religious freedom in the country. The Catholic Church continues to receive preferential treatment

from the government. Several government ministers and the president attended Catholic religious services. The latter continue to be a regular feature of all major events, such as National Day on 12th October and the President’s Birthday on 5th June. Last year, Muslims observed the month of Ramadan publicly, with a final celebration on Malabo’s seafront on 4th July.¹³

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

During the reporting period, the state of freedom of religion neither improved nor worsened in Equatorial Guinea. The situation remained stable, a trend that is likely to continue. Concerning the political situation, Equatorial Guinea has one of the most repressive political regimes in Africa. The president of the country, Obiang Nguema, seized power in 1979, which makes him Africa’s longest serving leader. Human rights organisations have described him as “one of Africa’s most brutal dictators”.¹⁴ There are no signs of political changes in the foreseeable future.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

1 Equatorial Guinea 1991 (rev. 2012), Constitute Project, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Equatorial_Guinea_2012?lang=en (accessed 6th August 2020).

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8 Ibid.

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10 “Agreement Between The Holy See And Equatorial Guinea,” The Catholic News, 13th October 2012, <https://catholicnews.sg/2012/10/22/agreement-between-the-holy-see-and-equatorial-guinea/> (accessed 27th December 2019).

11 Ibid.

12 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, op. cit.

13 “Los Musulmanes Finalizan El Ramadán En El Paseo Marítimo De Malabo.” Página Oficial Del Gobierno De La República De Guinea Ecuatorial, 7th June 2019, <https://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=13419> (accessed 28th December 2019).

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