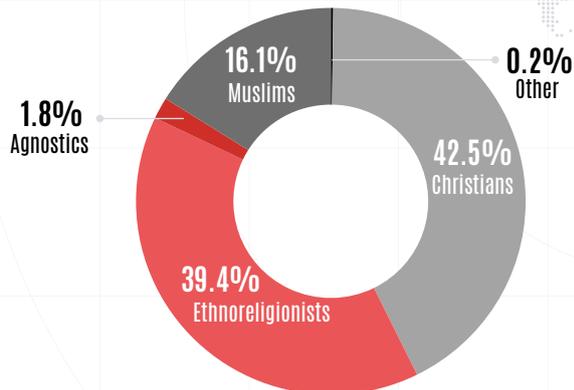




LIBERIA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Under the Constitution of Liberia, Church and state are separate, everybody is entitled to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Article 14),¹ and all religious groups are guaranteed equal treatment. Article 18 upholds the equality of opportunity for all Liberian citizens, “regardless of sex, creed, religion, ethnic background, place of origin or political affiliation”.²

Religious organisations, including missionary groups, are required to register. This gives them tax advantages as well as the right to appear in court as “a single entity.”³ Indigenous religious groups don’t have to register with the authorities as they are subject to customary law.

The curriculum at government-run schools offers “non-secular religious and moral education,” and covers religious traditions and moral values. ⁴ Private schools, many of which are run by Christian or Islamic organisations, receive state financial support.

Liberia was founded by freed American slaves resettled in Africa.⁵ Christians are the largest group but it is not unusual for some people to combine religious practices. Liberian society is broadly tolerant towards religion. The

(Protestant) Liberian Council of Churches and the National Muslim Council of Liberia represent the two largest religious communities. Liberia’s religious groups generally live in peace with each other, a practice encouraged and upheld by many of the Liberian politicians. The current President of the country, George Weah, is described by experts as a Christian Methodist who calls for “harmony between religions”.⁶ The Liberian government supports the Muslim community institutionally and financially by helping pilgrims travel to Mecca for the Hajj. In 2019, a total number of 335 Liberians travelled to Saudi Arabia (the highest number to perform the Hajj so far),⁷ a hundred of whom received financial help from the government.⁸ In March 2018, President George Weah appointed two Christians as religious advisors to his new administration. Leaders of Muslim organisations complained that these advisors would control access to the president rather than facilitate outreach.⁹

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In spite of the positive situation of religious freedom, some minor incidents have been reported in the country. In March 2019, a 21-year-old Muslim Liberian convert to Christianity had to flee the country after his house was

burnt down. He fears retaliation if he returns to Liberia.¹⁰

The Liberian Muslim Women Network expressed concerns that some of them are not allowed to wear the hijab in schools or workplaces. The organisation called on the government to ensure that Muslim women can wear the veil “without hindrance”.¹¹ The National Muslim Heritage Foundation of Liberia also called on the government to pay attention to two attacks allegedly committed against Muslim missions in the country. The organisation said that it would conduct an investigation before reaching “any conclusion”.¹²

On 17th September 2019, a fire broke out at an Islamic school near the capital Monrovia killing 27 people, including many children.¹³ Even though it was said to be caused by an electrical problem, the local Muslim community asked for an exhaustive and credible investigation.

After anti-COVID-19 measures were adopted, the Catho-

lic Bishops’ Conference of Liberia (CABICOL) expressed concern over the growing number of human rights violations by Liberia’s various security agencies, stressing the importance of acting within the confines of the law.¹⁴

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The current atmosphere of religious tolerance in Liberia is most likely to continue in the future. Religious freedom is upheld by government institutions, the country’s major political parties, and its religious communities.

The economic situation, however, is getting worse and mass civil protests have taken place over the last two years following the initial jubilation resulting from the election of President Weah. Protesters accuse the President of corruption in connection with various scandals, as well as mismanaging the economy. These challenges pose a risk to social and political stability in the coming years.¹⁵

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