



Equatorial Guinea



Stable / Unchanged —

Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **88.5%**
- Muslims : **4.0%**
- Agnostics : **3.3%**
- Atheists : **1.9%**
- Ethno-religionists : **1.7%**
- Others : **0.6%**

870,000

28,052 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 13 (section 1, f) of the constitution (adopted in 1995 and amended most recently via referendum in 2011) guarantees freedom “of religion and worship”, while article 15 states that “all discriminatory acts committed on the basis of tribal affiliation, sex, or religion” are “punishable by law”. Article 23 adds: “The state guarantees every person, private organisation or religious community the right to establish schools” – provided that they respect the official syllabus. This article also grants free choice in religious instruction “on the basis of freedom of conscience”^[1] This provision states that every individual is free to devote themselves to the study of his/her religion and should not be forced to follow another religion against their will.

In state schools, the study of religion is optional and may be replaced by a civil or social education course.

Article 9 of the constitution makes clear that political parties cannot be based on religion.

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 for the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea – neither of which is required to obtain state registration. In October 2013 the Government of Equatorial Guinea and the Holy See signed a concordat. In practice, this preferential treatment is demonstrated 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.

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. Some religious groups, including Muslims or Baha'is, need to register only once. Other, newer denominations may have to periodically renew their

registration. Unregistered groups can be fined or closed. 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.

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 9am and those held in non-registered places of worship can only go ahead with permission from the ministry. The decree prohibits 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.^[2]

| Incidents

The Catholic Church continues to enjoy preferential treatment by the government. A baptismal certificate is often accepted as an official identity document by state officials. Catholic Masses continue to be a regular feature of all major ceremonial services, such as National Day on 12th October and the President's birthday on 5th June. Catholic religious ceremonies and buildings^[3] are often funded by the President. For instance, on 28th May 2017, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema inaugurated a publicly-funded Catholic church, Our Lady of Bisila, situated on Pico Basilé, a mountain overlooking the capital, Malabo.^[4] On 20th May 2017, three new Catholic bishops were consecrated in Mongomo during a ceremony paid for with public funds.^[5]

Non-Catholic public officials continue to report that they are put under pressure to take part in religious activities, including attending Catholic Masses.^[6]

| Prospects for freedom of religion

During the reporting period, freedom of religion neither improved nor worsened. The situation remained stable, a trend that is likely to continue.

| Endnotes / Sources

[1] Ley fundamental de Guinea Ecuatorial, Guinea Ecuatorial, <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/imgdb/2012/LEYFUNDAMENTALREFORMADA.pdf> (accessed 8th February 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, 'Equatorial Guinea', Report on International Religious Freedom for 2014, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2014religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 8th February 2018).

[3] Interview on 12th January 2018 with an expatriate priest working in Equatorial Guinea.

[4] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, 'Equatorial Guinea', Report on International Religious Freedom for 2016, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 10th February 2018).

[5] 'El Cardenal Filoni en Guinea Ecuatorial para ordenar a tres obispos', Asodegue – 2^o Etapa, 17th May 2017, <http://www.asodeguesegundaetapa.org/el-cardenal-filoni-en-guinea-ecuatorial-para-ordenar-a-tres-obispos-agencia-fides/> (accessed 8th February 2018).

[6] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2016, *ibid*.