



**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN A PLURALISTIC AGE: TRENDS,  
CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES - OCTOBER 2-5 2011, AT BRIGHAM YOUNG  
UNIVERSITY, PROVO, UTAH .**

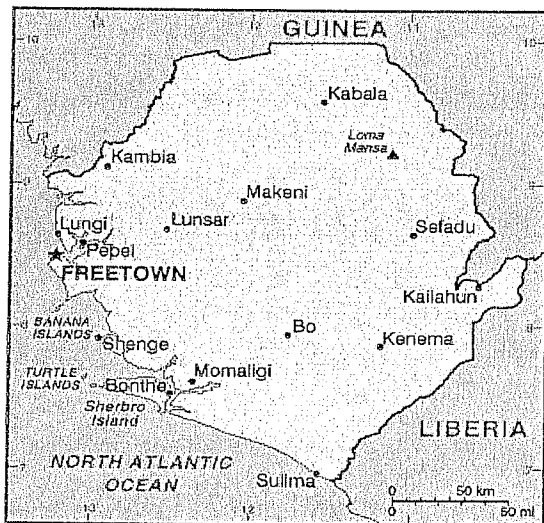
Bangura  
Monday  
4:00-5:00  
(Nigeria, Benin, Sierra  
Leone)

**SIERRA LEONE REPORT**

**1.1 GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT**

Sierra Leone is a small country located along the West Coast of African. It is bounded on the South East by Liberia on the North and North West and North East by Guinea Conakry and the South and South West by the Atlantic Ocean. The Land measures approximately 71.740 square km (about 45, 000 Squares Miles. There is a low lying coastal plain about 80km deep with the exception of the Freetown Peninsular which is dominated by Hills.

**Map of Sierra Leone.**



The 2004 National Census Survey indicated that Sierra Leone's total projected population for 2009 was 5,473,530 of this population about 53% or 2,743,560 represent the female population and the remaining 47% population constitutes the

male population. According to the same population projection Sierra Leone's population will reach the 6 million mark by 2012.

## 1.2 **THE SIERRA LEONE LEGAL SYSTEM**

The Sierra Leone legal system encompasses a combination of the constitution, common law, statutory and customary law. A two tiered system of common law based on the British system and local customary law characterizes the legal system. As a former British Colony, Sierra Leone received laws from Britain. This is guaranteed under section 74 of the Courts Act 1965 which states that 'subject to the provision of the constitution, the common law and the statutes of general application in England before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January 1880 shall automatically be part of the common law of Sierra Leone'.

Sierra Leone has had a number of constitutions since colonial rule to date. There was the 1863 constitution at the introduction of constitutional government in Sierra Leone, then the 1924 and 1951 constitutions. The 1961 constitution was introduced when Sierra Leone gained independence. Later the 1971 and 1978 constitutions which are referred to the Republican and one party constitution respectively were introduced. The current constitution is Act 6 of 1991. The constitution is the Supreme Law of the land and all other laws are derived from and must conform to it.

## 1.3 **CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION**

Sierra Leone divided into four administrative regions- North, South, East and West with twelve districts. The western area has 2 districts-Urban and Rural.

## 2.1 **SOCIAL CONTEXT**

Sierra Leone is a land of religious pluralism and religious tolerance and Religion. The Interreligious Council estimate that Freetown 60% of population is Muslim, 20 to 30 % Christian and 5 to 10 percent indigenous and other religious beliefs, mostly animists. There are a small number of Perhaps Hindus and Jews <sup>(1)</sup>

The situation of religions conflict in Sierra Leone has been stable and peaceful. Indeed Sierra Leone is known for its religions freedom and tolerance. The wise use of religious co-operation between the two major religions -Islam and Christianity has contributed immensely towards the peaceful resolution of diversity civil conflicts. Besides religion has been the oldest humanitarian institution provide fund shelter, clothing, education and health services many citizens practical a mixture of Islam or Christianity with traditional indigenou religious beliefs.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the Northern areas of the country and Christians in the South; however the eleven year old civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement between religions by large segment. However Islam predominates in all the country's three provincial districts and the Western Area.

Sierra Leone is unique being that it has no serious religious or ethnic Christmas or conflicts. People often married across tribal and religious boundaries.

For the Islamic followers, their marriages are regulated by the Mohamed marriage ordinance of 1905 and the Registration of customary marriage and Divorce Act 2007, whilst Christian Marriage is regulated by the Christian Marriage Act and the Registration of customary Marriage and divorce Act 2007.

Dominant among the Christian community are the Roman Catholics, United Methodist , Anglican Church, Methodist Church, etc. and of later after the war there has been an upsurge of Pentecostal and charismatic Churches. Other denominations of significance include Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint, ((Mormons) New Testament. Evangelicals and JehovahWitnesses. For Muslims there are - Ahamadiya, shiite, sunnie, Muslim Brotherhood.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

### **3.1 LEGAL POLICY AND FRAMEWORK**

The constitution provides for freedom of Religion and other laws and policies contribute to the general free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects these rights in full against abuse either by government or private actions

**The constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 section 15 A-D States:**

**FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF THE INDIVIDUAL**

Whereas every persons in Sierra Leone is entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, has the right, whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following:-

- (a) Life, liberty, security of person, the enjoyment of prosperity, and the protection of law;
- (b) Freedom of conscience, of expression and of assembly and association;
- (c) Respect for private and family life; and
- (d) Protection from deprivation of property without compensation;

**Sec 24 1-5 PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE**

1. Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of conscience and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Except with his own consent (or if he is a minor the consent of his parent or guardian) no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own.
3. No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community or denomination in the course of any education provided by that community or denomination.

4. No person shall be compelled to take any oath which is contrary to his religion or belief or to take any oath in a manner which is contrary to his religion or belief.
5. Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes a provision which is reasonably required;-

(a) In the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or

(b) For the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons including the right to observe and practice any religion without the unsolicited intervention of the members of any other religion; And except in so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under the authority thereof is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.

The government observes Eid ul Fitri the birth of Prophet Mohammed. Eid ul Fitri, Eid-ul ahda, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas day as national holiday.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs Serves as the government agency for regulating religious groups e.g. where conflict do arise. This office also co-ordinate and organise the Pilgrimage to the Holy land of Mecca.

All religious organisations are required to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. The government permits religious instructions in all schools. Students may choose whether to attend the religious knowledge classes offered by the school or not.

There had never been any reports of religious prisoners or detainees in this country.

3.2 The Government of Former President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah officially launched the Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1997) through the support of the world conference on religion and peace (WCRP). This was in a bid for

religious leaders of both Christian and Muslims who are in the Majority to promote religious freedom, dialogue, co-operation and tolerance in the country.

This council played a vital role in civil society and actively participated in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the sub region. This council have received application from Bahai and Jewish representation and their application is still pending due to resource constraints. But it is hoped that they will be admitted in the near future.

In instances of religious disputes, the IRCSL has intervened for example there was a report of associated abuse based on religious affiliation.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 2009, persons claimed to be acting on the orders of an unidentified Imam burned a church in a village of Rogban in Kambia district, reportedly in response to the razing of the abandoned Mosque that has previously occupied the site. There were no injuries.

A government task force which invaded government ministers, religious leaders and observers from the diplomatic community visited the church site, heard testimony from villagers and interviewed stakeholders. The matter was quietly settled by the IRCSL and both parties concerned were asked to apologize to each other and a new and bigger site was provided for the church.

In April, 2005 on a Muslim public holiday, a group of Muslims in a place called Rokupr burned the igbalah (hut or shine) where the local hunting society stored its traditional hunting masks so that the group could not stage its traditional parade. A local newspaper represented and police confirmed that the Muslims burned the masks because they believed that the pagan tradition was a desecration of the Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Police arrested several persons from both groups but the local chief brought the two groups together and resolved the case out of court. Notwithstanding this, some cases of clashes between Muslims and Christians are presently in court awaiting decision.

### **3.3 Protocols for foreigners -Missionary**

Foreign Missionaries are expected to register with the Immigration department as foreign residents with a minimal fee of 100 (one hundred dollars) 400,000.000 9four hundred thousand leones on an annual basis

#### 3.4 **Work of Religious organizations**

All religious organizations are free to work in Sierra Leone as long as they uphold the tenets of the constitution and respect the religion of others.

Some has established school, college, Health Services, and relief in deprived areas (both Muslims and Christians)

#### 4.1 **State and financial support to Religion**

The government does not support any religious organization financially as a policy but during the month of Ramadan gesture of goodwill in the form of rice- staple food; oil and sugar are provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs for the congregation of various mosques

#### 5.1 **Challenges**

Eventhough Sierra Leone as a country has enjoyed religious tolerance and freedom, yet there has been some religious clashes here and there though not very serious.

The proliferation of Pentecostal and charismatic churches normally referred to as `born Again` churches and the existence of tablik and Zealous Muslim clerics has been fuelling some threats to religious freedom in Sierra Leone. The advent of preaching hate sermons against another religion has been creating religious conflicts though not very significant. There are examples where religion and religious leaders have helped to resolve conflicts as already cited.

The IRCSL and the Ministry of Social Welfare have been involved in mediation and development of a code of conduct for religious organizations considering the new wave of societal abuses and discrimination that is gradually eroding our society. If this is not checked at this moment, it is feared that a difficult situation will erupt one day and this is what we as Sierra Leonean do not want to see. The Ministry is planning a conference to develop the code of conduct after consultation nationwide

since we have been described as one of the most religious tolerant countries, we can provide strength upon which religious values of peace, love, Godliness, and respect can be built.

Another challenge facing religious freedom on Sierra Leone is the use of modern information, communication and technologies. Modern communications have been us all increasingly aware of other faiths we are brought with into contact with many religious and their ideologies on the internet, television and radio, newspaper and video tape as well as through mobile phones, text messages. It is worth noting that modern communication is not the problem for religion but if not used wisely can more harm than good.

The high level of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment plaguing the young people in Sierra Leone is another serious threat to our religious freedom and tolerance .when we get beyond the surface of this matter we cannot downplay the issue of religious indoctrination and exploitation of young people. Indeed, Sierra Leoneans are blessed with religious tolerance and freedom which many countries are yearning for, but this can be only being sustained if young people are empowered educationally.

## **6.1 CONCLUSION**

If Religion should be relevant and meaningful to its people, we need to build and sustain the culture of peaceful co-existence in relationship with people of other faiths through collaborative efforts at local, national and international level. We also need to demonstrate tolerance and respect for one another, especially where religious fundamentalism and discriminatory practices occur most frequent.

We need to understand that religion has been the oldest humanitarian institution and that religion is a vital component for peace and human development.