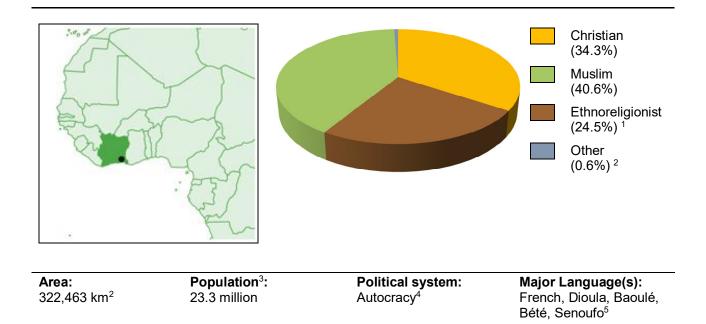
IVORY COAST



Legal Framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

There are roughly 70 different ethnic groups within Ivory Coast, added to which there is a high percentage of migrants from neighbouring countries. The country's religious composition is evenly split between traditional African religions, which still command a strong following, Islam and Christianity. Over half the Christians are Catholics, while around a quarter each belong respectively to Protestant and other communities. Widely known outside Ivory Coast is the country's copy of Saint Peter's in Rome. The Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Paix in Yamoussoukro is seen as a symbol of the Christian faith in West Africa. The basilica is criticised by some for what they regard as its disproportionate scale.

In scarcely any other West African country has there been such a battle for influence and power as in Ivory Coast. This is one of the economically strongest and most populous nations in the region. After the 2002-7 civil war, conflict flared up again in connection with the 2010 presidential elections. Violent clashes erupted between supporters of the official winner, Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim, and his defeated opponent and predecessor in office, Laurent Gbagbo, a Christian. More than 3,000 people died in the fighting, while hundreds of thousands were driven from their homes. Yet what appeared at first glance to be a war between the mainly Muslim north of the country, the homeland of Ouattara, and the mainly Christian south, Gbagbo's base, was in reality much more a matter of political domination. It is worth noting that Christians and Muslims have traditionally lived peaceably side by side despite the country's wide ethnic and religious mix. The violence was for many an attempt to escape from grinding poverty and a hopeless future.

According to the constitution, Ivory Coast is a secular state, based on the French model.⁹ Article nine of the constitution of the year 2000 guarantees religious freedom among other things.¹⁰ Traditionally, members of the various religious communities cooperate well. In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country such as Ivory Coast, this is an essential pre-condition for peace. Broadly speaking, the country is divided into two: Islam is the prevailing religion of the vast majority of

people in and from the north. It is also the faith of many immigrants from the neighbouring northern countries, especially Burkina Faso. Christianity is the prevailing religion in the south.

Incidents

Generally speaking, there have been no official changes in regard to religious freedom during the period of the report. However, especially concerning inter-faith relations, the legacy of the past continues to weigh heavily. For many Christians, the political unrest linked to the 2010 presidential elections had a traumatic effect. Fierce fighting took place between supporters of the outgoing president, Laurent Gbagbo, a Christian, and backers of the newly elected head of state, Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim. According to information from Catholic priests, 40 churches were attacked by armed gangs. On 7th August 2013, Jesuit Father Hyacinthe Loua stated on Vatican Radio: "For three years now, people have been speaking of reconciliation in this country, but little has happened. We are endeavouring to do our best and we are fully aware that it will take a long time. If we are to speak of the healing of the wounds of war, then we need to realise that it will take years."

In 2016 these words have lost little of their relevance. Although there has been some progress, the reconciliation process is still far from complete. Ivory Coast faces two central challenges: on the one hand, the country has taken in a huge number of people from neighbouring countries in recent decades, many of whom now live as stateless people. It is said that there are around four million people who have arrived, partly for economic reasons and partly as refugees from civil wars elsewhere. This represents 20 percent of the total population. Without a successful social and cultural integration of these migrants, reconciliation, justice and peace are almost unthinkable.

One important step was the reform of citizenship laws on 22nd August 2013. Lawmakers passed two laws concerning nationality. One allowed foreigners to acquire Ivorian citizenship upon marriage to an Ivorian national. The second allowed foreign-born residents living in Ivory Coast since before independence to become citizens along with their descendants. Foreign nationals born in Ivory Coast between 1961 and 1973 and their children would also qualify.¹²

Many migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries – and UN figures at the beginning of 2016 give a figure of over 720,000 refugees in Ivory Coast – are living in poverty in the country, as indeed are many native Ivorians. This is despite the fact that the country has reported considerable economic growth in recent years. The occasional tensions between members of the various religious communities are to be seen against this background, since in most cases they are less a matter of religious zeal or hatred, and more one of dissatisfaction with their economic and social situation. Political conflict, which has gone so far as violence, has similarly set people against one another.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Against the backdrop of numerous crimes committed during the civil wars, the Catholic bishops of the country have supported the work of reconciliation and called for justice and peace.¹³ Vatican-based Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, visited Ivory Coast in March 2015 to mark the 110th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Korhogo, in the north of the country. He remarked that ignorance of the other was often a cause of war. He said: "We must work together to banish every form of discrimination and intolerance." He was cited as saying this in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*.¹⁴

Cardinal Tauran emphasised that the Catholic Church respects people of other faiths and recognises what is true and holy in their religions.

On 24th March 2015 President Outtara appointed Archbishop Paul Simeon Ahouana to take charge of reconciliation initiatives in Ivory Coast following the presidential elections of 25th October 2015. While the economy has revived under Outtara's government, political and ethnic divisions continued to prevent the emergence of long-term stability. During the civil war, Archbishop Ahouana, whose diocese is based in Bouake, the second-largest city, was recognised for his ability to maintain an open dialogue with the rebel forces.¹⁵

On 25th October 2015, the people of Ivory Coast returned to the polls to elect a new president. The incumbent, President Outtara, was victorious in the first round of voting, benefitting from divisions within the opposition. It was however a sign of progress that the elections passed off peacefully in contrast to the bloodshed of 2010. Back then, when Ouattara won the election, he was only able to claim victory and oust his predecessor Laurent Gbagbo with the support of rebel troops from the north and pressure from the international community. Gbagbo was finally arrested in April 2011 and in the following November, was extradited to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. There, his trial finally began on 28th January 2016 in connection with the fighting in Abidjan in early 2011. He denied all the charges against him.

Gbagbo's trial was controversial, since he was the only one of the warring parties to face charges. His opponents from President Ouattara's camp seemed to be escaping blame. Hence, in a number of African countries, the impartiality of the court proceedings has been challenged ¹⁷. Meanwhile, President Ouattara is visibly attempting to deflect the accusations against him. Thus, in January 2016 the entire government resigned in order to pave the way for what Ouattara proclaimed as a renewal of the country. The President has now instructed the former Prime Minister, Daniel Kablan Duncan, to form a new government. ¹⁸

And so, despite a generally positive move towards greater democracy in recent years, it remains to be seen whether Ivory Coast will regain stability, a vital pre-condition for peaceful inter-faith coexistence.

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¹ traditional religions;

² http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country 61 2.asp

³ CIA 2016: The World Factbook, estimate, July 2015

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index

⁵ French (official), Dioula (in simplified form for over 60% of the population; also spoken in neighbouring Burkina Faso to the north). Baoulé, Bété and Senoufo are important vehicular (and in some cases regional) languages: Munzinger Archiv 2016

⁶ ibid.

⁷ Auslandsinformationen der Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Vol. 9/15

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⁹ www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/CoteDIvoire/Innenpolitik node.html

¹⁰ http://abidjan.usembassy.gov/ivoirian_constitution2.html

¹¹ Agenzia Fides,09.11.11

¹² www.reuters.com/article/us-ivorycoast-laws-idUSBRE97M0Y120130823]

¹³ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/03/25/elfenbeink%C3%BCste_erz-

¹⁴ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/03/17/kardinal_tauran_%E2%80%9Emangelndes wissen f%C3%BChrt zu krieg%E2%80%9C/1129943

¹⁵ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/03/25/elfenbeink%C3%BCste_erz-bischof_zur_vers%C3%B6hnung_beauftragt/1131969

bischof_zur_vers%C3%B6hnung_beauftragt/1131969

16 http://www.nzz.ch/international/klarer-wahlsieg-fuer-praesident-ouattara-1.18637196

¹⁷ Munzinger Archiv 2016

¹⁸ ibid.