

Muslims of Equatorial Guinea

Possessing a few islands in the Atlantic Ocean, Equatorial Guinea is one of the smallest countries in Africa. Muslims make up 5-10% of the country's population, while 90% follow Roman Catholicism. The majority of Muslims in the country live on the mainland. Muslim presence on the islands is virtually non-existent. Islam made its first appearance in the region in the 11th century during the Almoravid rule based in Morocco. Proselytizing and preaching groups active on the Western coast of Africa in this period moved southward and reached what is now Equatorial Guinea.

The increasing visits of Muslims merchants based in Nigeria until the 16th century also led to an increase in the number of Muslims here. Lastly, the Islamization of the Fang people, who chose Cameroon as their homeland after the 1600s, helped convert the Fang community in Equatorial Guinea along with the related populations living in neighboring countries.

Due to its geographic distance from the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires based in Western Africa, the number of Muslims in the region increased very slowly. Following the emergence of colonialist movements in the 19th century and especially the Spanish occupation of 1879, the era of European domination began in the region. By establishing strong state authorities here, the Europeans cleared the way for the Church. Prohibiting all kinds of Islamic activity from the beginning, Spanish colonizers resorted to violent and brutal means to subjugate Muslim groups alongside others.

The majority of Muslims in Equatorial Guinea today live in the northern and northeastern parts of the country where the Fang ethnic group live in large numbers. The Muslim population in the remaining parts of the country is very small. Muslim workers who came from Nigeria in recent years to work here have contributed to the increase of the Muslim population in the country.

Following the strict and relentless Spanish colonial rule that lasted until 1968, an era of unstable dictatorships began in the country and ethnic conflicts, as well as political feuds claimed the lives of thousands. This instability continued until 1995 when American companies discovered oil in the country. The only country in Africa with Spanish as its official language, Equatorial Guinea is one of the most important producers of petroleum in the region. Considered to be one of the bloodiest dictatorships of Africa, the Catholic Church as the representative of state religion took an active part in all of these massacres.

As making one's way through government ranks is impossible without the approval of the Catholic Church, along with Muslims, many Protestants and Animists became victims of the established official system.

While it is rich in oil, the resources in Equatorial Guinea are allocated to a small minority due to income inequality. Social justice in the country is so corrupt that 70% of the population live below the poverty line. More than half of the population do not have access to clean drinking water, and 20% of children die before the age of five. The country is among the worst in the world not only in economic terms, but also in terms of political rights and freedoms.

Muslims in Equatorial Guinea live in difficult political, as well as economic conditions. In addition to having no political representation, the office of Mufti, which was established to regulate religious activity but remains unauthorized, is not taken seriously by the state. As there is no authority to which the mosques in various cities belong, the ties among the Muslim minority are quite loose.

Surface area: 28,051 km²

Population: 722,254

Muslim population: 5-10%

Capital: Malabo

Official language: Spanish, French, Portuguese