



# Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance

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## *Executive Summary*

Burkina Faso's great religious diversity and tolerance make it an exception in Africa's sub-Saharan Sahel. Its model of religious coexistence remains solid but could be at risk of being eroded. For several years now, Muslim leaders have complained that Muslims are under-represented in the civil service and that the administration is not always even-handed in its treatment of Christianity and Islam. Meanwhile, the rising tide of religiously motivated violence in West Africa and the Sahel has created a new regional context. As Burkina is recovering from a period of instability following the October 2014 downfall of former President Blaise Compaoré, and faced with a security emergency and strong social pressures, the government could be tempted to ignore these developments. It would be risky to raise the sensitive issue of religion in a country where religious identity is of secondary importance. But the government must take steps now to ease frustrations and regulate religious discourse to safeguard Burkina's model of peaceful coexistence.

Burkina lies at the crossroads of two large regions in West Africa: the Sahel region, where a fundamentalist form of Islam seems to be gaining ground and armed and terrorist groups are active; and the coastal region, where new Protestant churches sometimes adopt an intolerant discourse toward other religions. Given the porosity of borders and the speed at which ideas circulate, the country cannot remain untouched by the changes that are affecting its neighbours.

Burkina has never suffered civil war or religious conflict. Muslims, Christians and animists are neighbours, live together and inter-marry. However, the January 2016 attacks in Ouagadougou were a shock to both the general public and the ruling class. Isolated incidents of verbal aggression against Muslims were reported in the following weeks. They revealed some degree of stigmatisation and reflected concerns that had not been present until then. Religious matters are taboo in Burkina. Peaceful coexistence is based on religious pluralism and the secondary importance of religious identity. Bringing the question of religion into the public and political arena carries risks, including exacerbation of religious differences and political manipulation of identities. However, in a worrying regional context and as new domestic tensions emerge, it is time to break the taboo.

Muslims have long been frustrated at the discrepancy between their numbers – according to a contested census they represent about 60 per cent of the population, Christians 25 per cent and animists 15 per cent – and their low representation within the political elite and the civil service. They also feel that public administration is sometimes biased in favour of Christianity and does not take their interests sufficiently into account. Frustrations are sometimes exaggerated, but perceptions are more important than reality. In a country long ruled by a mainly Christian elite, this imbalance is not due to intentional discrimination; rather, it is the legacy of colonisation and a multi-tiered education system. Burkina's authorities must correct the imbalance while avoiding sectarianism. They must upgrade Franco-Arab education, which caters for a certain number of Muslim children and aims to combine Islamic and general education. If they fail to do so, some parts of the population may no longer feel the state is a useful interlocutor and turn to other ways of expressing their feelings.

It is all the more important to maintain the balance between communities given that individual religious behaviours have evolved, though it is difficult to assess the extent of such changes. Some Muslims are attracted to a fundamentalist form of Islam inspired by Wahhabism. Certain Muslim leaders are concerned about foreign influence, especially from Gulf countries, which, although difficult to measure, may contribute to the development of stricter religious practices. Meanwhile, some Protestants are attracted by the discourse of new churches, some of which preach values that have little to do with tolerance.

However, the rise in religiosity does not mean a higher risk of violence – a distinction rarely made in the current debate on violent extremism and religious radicalisation. The return to a more fundamentalist Islam does not necessarily involve a greater propensity to violence, as shown by the existence of fundamentalist quietist currents. Similarly, violence that seems to be religiously motivated may in fact be due to other reasons, such as crime, greed and local, ethnic or socio-economic grievances. Changes in religious behaviour may nevertheless be dangerous when they disrupt social relations. Disregard of or refusal to dialogue with other faiths could lead to communities withdrawing into themselves. The authorities must understand the significance of this risk and do more to regulate religious discourse.

Burkina's technical and financial partners can play a key role in providing advice and support for the necessary reforms, including building the capacities of the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Internal Security (MATDSI), which is responsible for overseeing religious affairs, and the National Observatory on Religious Affairs (ONAFAR), which is attached to the ministry. Burkina is a small, very poor country with few natural resources. But its position at the heart of the increasingly troubled Sahel region and its capacity to withstand political instability have made it a firewall against religious radicalisation and terrorism in West Africa. Burkina's religious pluralism and tolerance set a good example. For all these reasons, the Burkinabè government and its international partners should address the tensions that are starting to appear between religious communities and between them and the state.

## *Recommendations*

*To ensure a more representative political and civil service elite*

**To the Burkina Faso authorities:**

1. Improve the representation of Muslims within the political and civil service elite without resorting to the dangerous method of using quotas by:
  - a) continuing efforts to upgrade the Franco-Arab education system, especially by requiring high standards in the use of the French language, introducing a national curriculum for all French-Arab schools, and publicising such efforts through the media;
  - b) granting equivalent status for degrees awarded by universities in Arab countries and ensuring that graduates are well-informed about the procedures, so as to facilitate their access to employment and reduce their feelings of social exclusion; and
  - c) exploring opportunities to facilitate French language learning for Arab university graduates, for example by creating training centres, possibly with the support of technical and financial partners.
2. Realise the dangers posed by begging and the limited prospects for thousands of children leaving Quranic schools, and release financial resources to remedy these problems.
3. Give greater status to Arabic in secondary and higher education, for example by offering Arabic courses and re-considering the creation of an Arabic language department at the University of Ouagadougou.

**To Muslim leaders:**

4. Improve communication with the public about the government's efforts to upgrade Franco-Arab education so as to reduce misunderstandings between the government and Muslim leaders and citizens.
5. Work with the government to reform Franco-Arab education and accept the government's requirements in this respect.

*To ensure visibility of all religions in the public sphere*

**To the Burkina Faso authorities:**

6. Encourage better representation of the various religions when participation of religious authorities is requested, by giving equal representation to Christians and Muslims.
7. Guarantee equal status and visibility to all religions in public affairs and in the media, particularly on Burkina Radio-Television (RTB) and during religious holidays.

*To improve the regulation of religious discourse and promote coexistence*

**To the Burkina Faso authorities:**

8. Begin, as far as resources allow, a mapping of all places of worship and their leaders throughout the country, following the Ivorian example where religious leaders have an electronic ID with names, contact details and religious affiliation.
9. Grant more financial resources to the public freedoms and political affairs department of the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Internal Security (MATDSI) so that staff are able to work effectively.
10. Adopt the bill on religious freedom prepared by the MATDSI and then publicise the new law to the general public.
11. Strengthen the National Observatory on Religious Affairs (ONAFAR) by increasing its budget, recruiting administrative staff to support its volunteer members and providing office equipment.

**To religious leaders:**

12. Prepare the next generation of leaders by ensuring greater participation by young people and women in faith associations, and promote unity within each movement and each religion.

**To ONAFAR:**

13. Formulate a communications strategy to publicise its role and activities, organise public education campaigns, using the media (especially radio) and, in the long term, set up regional and provincial offices.

**To the authorities, religious leaders and the media:**

14. Give greater publicity to examples of religious coexistence using the media, especially radio.

**To technical and financial partners:**

15. Increase support to interfaith dialogue initiatives, whether they come from the government or from religious associations, prioritising youth organisations, and consider providing financial assistance to ONAFAR and budgetary support for the reforms that the government must implement (Franco-Arab education, mapping of places of worship, etc.).

**Dakar/Brussels, 6 September 2016**

# Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance

## I. Introduction

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According to the 2006 census, Burkina's population is 60.5 per cent Muslim, 19 per cent Catholic, 15.3 per cent animist and 4.2 per cent Protestant.<sup>1</sup> These figures should, however, be treated with caution. The census was conducted ten years ago; religious mobility is high in Burkina; and many Christians and Muslims adhere to a syncretic version of their religions that draws on animist practices.<sup>2</sup> Most families are mixed and it would be unwise to deduce from names or the head of the family's faith that all relatives are followers of a particular religion.<sup>3</sup> These figures, though they are disputed,<sup>4</sup> give some idea of the situation until the results of the census scheduled for December 2016 are published.

The question of the balance between religious communities differs from region to region: in Ouagadougou, the capital, the religious landscape is varied and more susceptible to external influences; the Sahel, northern and western regions are strongly Islamised; and in the central, southern and eastern parts of the country, Islam either has less of a majority or is in a minority, while animism is still important.

Although, for the moment, Burkina's model of peaceful coexistence remains robust, it is beginning to be eroded at the margins. Tensions are emerging between the state and religions (neutrality is difficult in a multi-faith context) and between and within the different religious communities. Religious matters are largely taboo in Burkina. Several interviewees recognised that problems exist but preferred not to discuss them, or at least not publicly, for fear that it would create tensions.<sup>5</sup> With typical Burkinabe optimism, others were convinced that there is no threat to the peaceful religious coexistence.<sup>6</sup> Most interviewees nevertheless admitted that tensions are emerging and that they might prove dangerous in the long term. These difficulties highlight the need to start a discussion on these issues, which are sensitive but crucial for social cohesion.

These questions pose a genuine dilemma for the authorities. It is tempting to believe that the country's model of religious tolerance is strong enough to dispense with a complex discussion on sensitive questions with no obvious solution. Such a

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics are available at <http://bit.ly/1WHp2Sm>. A regional breakdown of figures is available at <http://bit.ly/2106VY8>.

<sup>2</sup> Crisis Group interviews, analyst, journalist, Ouagadougou, April 2016. Katrin Langewiesche, *Mobilité religieuse. Changements religieux au Burkina Faso* (Münster, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Crisis Group interviews, priests, Ouagadougou, Ouahigouya, April 2016; minister, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>4</sup> For example, a minister told Crisis Group that a Muslim was in command of the ministry in charge of the census and that the results were therefore biased. Crisis Group interview, minister, Ouagadougou, January 2016. The economy and finance ministry, responsible for conducting the census, was led at the time by Seydou Bouda.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, January, April 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interviews, politicians, civil society representatives, Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016, Dédougou, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

debate carries the risk of exacerbating religious identities, or even provoking antagonisms, and could tempt some politicians into manipulation. However, as the regional context is coloured by the rise of religiosity and violence in the name of Islam, combined with longstanding frustrations, it would be sensible to start the discussion.

This report aims to encourage and contribute to the discussion about relations between the state and religions, between the different religious communities and the tensions within these groups in Burkina. It is part of a series of Crisis Group reports on the theme of religion, state and society.<sup>7</sup> The report shows that Burkina's model of peaceful coexistence remains strong and that countries faced with religious tensions or at risk of facing such tensions can learn from Burkina's example. However, Burkina's model, which is the product of the country's specific history and culture, cannot be exported as it is, especially to countries such as Niger and Mali, where the overwhelming majority of the population is Muslim and the religious context therefore differs. Finally, although it is not a study of radicalisation, this report highlights that relations between religions and the state create frustrations in Burkina, and concludes that interested parties must take these into consideration so as to preserve the model of tolerance. It finally makes recommendations that contribute to a solution.

The report is based on more than one hundred interviews with Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders, members of youth associations, civil servants, government and civil society representatives, researchers and analysts in Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Kaya, Dori, Ouahigouya, Dédougou and Fada N'Gourma, mainly in January and April 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°229, *Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism*, 3 September 2015, and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°117, *Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, 22 February 2016.



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## II. A Resilient Model of Religious Tolerance

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Understanding Burkina's religious diversity requires taking a look at the history of how religions spread across the country. Several factors explain the resilience of the model of religious tolerance, despite recent tensions.

### A. A Deeply-rooted Religious Pluralism

The peaceful progress of Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism explains why religious pluralism in Burkina is so deeply rooted. From the sixteenth century onwards, Yarsé and Dioula traders and Fulani herders helped spread Islam respectively in the north, west and Sahel regions of the territory that is now Burkina Faso.<sup>8</sup> Eager to boost their business, traders accepted customary power structures. They gradually spread Islam to other groups, particularly the Mossi, but African traditions based on animism continued to carry considerable weight.<sup>9</sup> After having resisted for a long time, the Mogho Naba, King of the Mossi, converted to Islam in a personal capacity at the end of the eighteenth century. It continued to spread during the colonial period.<sup>10</sup> With no political aspirations, Islam long remained under the "triple domination" of customary power, then colonisation and finally Catholicism.<sup>11</sup>

Catholicism arrived much later, at the start of the twentieth century, with the French colonial administration. The Catholic Church wanted to promote literacy and education, in accordance with the colonisers' civilising mission, and to produce Burkina's future elites. The work of Father Joanny Thévenoud, a French priest who arrived in Upper Volta at the start of the twentieth century, was decisive for the establishment and development of Catholicism in the country. His opposition to colonial administration attracted many to Catholicism. After independence, the Catholic Church became a major political force, notably thanks to its close relations with the country's first president, Maurice Yaméogo.<sup>12</sup> The Church was also active in social and humanitarian work, which helped consolidate its position.

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<sup>8</sup> Issa Cissé, "Islam et économie au Burkina Faso. Relations et enjeux", History and Archaeology Department, Ouagadougou University, undated; Adrienne Vanvyve, "L'islam burkinabè sous la IVème République", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, no. 219, vol. 3 (2015); and Assimi Kouanda, "La progression de l'islam au Burkina pendant la période coloniale", in Gabriel Massa, Georges Madiéga, *La Haute-Volta coloniale: témoignages, recherches, regards* (Paris, 1995). Crisis Group interview, specialist on Islam in Burkina, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, Ouagadougou, April 2016. Adama Ouédraogo, "Les mosquées de Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso): organisation et fonctionnement", *Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales*, vol. 38, pp. 45-71 (2007).

<sup>10</sup> "La progression de l'islam au Burkina pendant la période coloniale", op. cit.; and "L'islam burkinabè sous la IVème République", op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Assimi Kouanda, "Les confits au sein de la communauté musulmane du Burkina: 1962-1986", in Ousmane Kane, Jean-Louis Triaud, *Islam et Islamismes au sud du Sahara* (Paris, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Yaméogo received a Catholic education at the Pabré Seminary, nursery of the elites. However, his relations with the Church deteriorated following his second marriage (the Catholic Church does not recognise divorce). The loss of support from the Church contributed to his fall from power in 1966. Jean-Marie Bouron, "Amitiés, inimitiés. Les rapports incertains de l'Eglise catholique avec la Première République voltaïque (1960-1966)", *Civilisations*, no. 60, vol. 1 (2011). Ismaïla Kane, "Etats et minorités religieuses: les représentations des catholiques au Burkina Faso et au Sénégal", thesis, Ottawa University (2015).

Protestantism was imported from the U.S. at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Church of the Assemblies of God was the first evangelical church to establish itself in Burkina and it remains the main Protestant denomination in the country to this day. Burkina quickly became one of the main targets for evangelisation in West Africa. Protestantism initially grew in rural areas and spread to the towns from the 1980s onwards.<sup>13</sup>

This brief historical outline helps understand the current situation. There are many Catholics among the political and administrative elites while Muslims, who form the majority of the country's population, are underrepresented. For a long time, Muslims avoided Catholic schools, which they perceived as instruments of colonial domination and evangelisation. What a Muslim leader called the "massive delay in Muslims' involvement in the administration of the country" is a result of history.<sup>14</sup>

The situation evolved in the 1970s due to several factors. In 1966, General Sangoulé Lamizana, the only Muslim president of independent Burkina, came to power. This opened a period of diplomatic rapprochement with Arab countries, which provided development aid. At the same time, the return of many Burkinabè from the pilgrimage in Mecca increased the visibility of Islam in Burkina and its inclination to make demands. This "Islamic awakening", as anthropologist Maud Saint-Lary termed it, took place in many sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>15</sup>

Muslims gradually became more aware of their identity and demographic weight, and also of their lack of organisation, stark in contrast to the well-structured and organised Catholic Church. This was manifested in 1962 with the creation of the Muslim Community of Upper Volta (now the Muslim Community of Burkina Faso, CMBF), which aimed to represent the interests of all Burkinabè Muslims. From then on, Muslims want to "ensure their aspirations are taken into account while respecting the principle of secularism".<sup>16</sup> They believe that only those Muslim elites who are capable of navigating the political and administrative system inherited from the West will be able to defend their interests.

Attending school became indispensable and produced a Muslim elite capable of formulating demands. In the 1970s, competition to this Francophone elite, many of whom had been educated at Christian schools, emerged with Arab-educated intellectuals who had studied at Arab universities with the help of scholarships. This prompted an increase in the number of Franco-Arab schools that aimed to provide a Western education while promoting an Islamic identity.<sup>17</sup> For several reasons, however, these changes did not call into question the country's model of religious tolerance.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on Protestantism in Burkina, see Pierre-Joseph Laurent's work, especially *Les pentecôtistes du Burkina Faso: mariage, pouvoir et guérison* (Paris, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muslim representative, Ouagadougou, January 2016. All the Muslims interviewed by Crisis Group recognised that this "delay" was due to their rejection of school during the colonial period and the first two decades after independence. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim representatives, Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Kaya, Dori, Dédougou, Ouahigouya, Fada N'Gourma, February and July 2015, January, April 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See Maud Saint-Lary's work on Islam in Burkina, for example, "Le Coran en cours du soir. La formation comme outil de réislamisation des musulmans francophones", *ethnographiques.org*, no. 22 (May 2011).

<sup>16</sup> "Les confits au sein de la communauté musulmane du Burkina: 1962-1986", *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Issa Cissé, "Les médersas au Burkina Faso. L'aide arabe et l'enseignement arabo-islamique", in *Islam et islamismes au sud du Sahara*, *op. cit.*, and René Otayek, "L'affirmation élitaine des arabi-

### B. *The Factors behind the Resilience of the Peaceful Coexistence Model*

Several factors ensure the strength of Burkina's peaceful coexistence model. All interviewees emphasised that the different religious communities do not simply live side by side, they live together. There are few Burkinabè who do not have a friend, relative or neighbour of a different faith. Even though the religious landscape varies from one region to another, there are no exclusively Christian, Muslim or animist areas, regions, towns or districts.

Religious mobility is high and it is rare for all members of a family (in the broader sense of the term) to practise the same religion. Conversions and mixed marriages are common, and although they sometimes lead to quarrels, families generally accept their children's choice. Faith is a very personal thing in Burkina, as a Catholic representative summarised.<sup>18</sup> This great diversity sustains the country's model of religious coexistence, because, as many interviewees underlined, "one is human and Burkinabè before being Christian or Muslim".<sup>19</sup> Religion is not therefore a primary badge of identity.<sup>20</sup>

Christians and Muslims draw on animist practices, which tend to bring people of different faiths closer together. In Burkina, as in many other African countries, Sufi Islam and Catholic retention of animist practices, such as sacrifices, has produced religious syncretism.<sup>21</sup> The weight of tradition is evidenced by the strong influence of customary chiefs in social relations and politics.<sup>22</sup> One legacy of this tradition, the "*parenté à plaisanterie*", is a practise whereby members of some ethnic groups can tease and insult each other light-heartedly, without coming across as offensive. This sense of humour helps defuse certain social tensions.<sup>23</sup>

Although the post-independence nation state is still under construction, a sense of national identity facilitates social cohesion amid ethnic, regional and religious differences. This is partly due to the existence of a relatively present administration, even though the state is weak and absent from some areas, as is often the case in developing countries. The sense of national identity is also a legacy of the Sankarist revolution, which intensified patriotic sentiments and political consciousness.<sup>24</sup>

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sants au Burkina Faso", in René Otayek (dir.), *Le radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara* (Paris, 1993). For more on Franco-Arab schools, see section III.B.3.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interview, Catholic representative, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group interviews, ministers, priests, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group interviews, minister, deputy, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>22</sup> During recent crises (October 2014 insurrection, September 2015 attempted coup), the Mogho Naba's intervention, at the request of politicians, helped avoid confrontations.

<sup>23</sup> The *parenté à plaisanterie* is a widespread social practise in West Africa. It is a kind of "inverted politeness" that allows members of lineages, ethnic groups, territories or neighbouring villages to tease and insult each other during meetings and discussions. Among the *parentés à plaisanteries* most practised in Burkina are those used by the Bobo and the Fulanis and also the Samo and the Mossi. The insults and teasing often refer to eating habits or livelihoods. For example, the Bobo say that the Fulanis destroy their crops with their cattle while the Fulanis say that the Bobo are alcoholics. All Crisis Group interviewees emphasised the importance of the *parenté à plaisanterie* in maintaining good relations between ethnic groups. This also applies by extension to people of different faiths because it promotes a culture of accepting differences.

<sup>24</sup> The revolution (1983-1987) was led by the young captain Thomas Sankara whose anti-imperialist ideas, patriotism and integrity had an enduring impact on Burkina's history, culture and politics.

Interfaith dialogue supports peaceful coexistence. Religious leaders are aware of the importance of such dialogue and they play a crucial role, although their sincerity is sometimes doubted.<sup>25</sup> They are respected, know one another personally and visit one another during religious holidays, which provides a positive, top-down example. Even though this dialogue is not enough to guarantee religious tolerance, it makes an indispensable contribution. In Burkina, Christians and Muslims demonstrated together against the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in January 2015, while in Niger demonstrators burned down bars and churches.<sup>26</sup>

Interfaith dialogue is also a reality at the grassroots level. For example, youth associations of different faiths regularly work together. At university, Joint Interfaith Dialogue Committees (CMDIRs) bring together the Catholic Student Youth (JEC), the Association of Muslim Pupils and Students in Burkina (AEEMB) and the Union of Biblical Groups in Burkina (UGBB).<sup>27</sup> Most Crisis Group interviewees shared anecdotes that illustrated the good relations between religions: in Dori, the imam of the main mosque helped the Assemblies of God to obtain a plot of land to build their church; in Dédougou, a private Christian radio station gives Muslims airtime to broadcast their sermons; in Fada N’Gourma, the bishop offered Muslims the church’s contribution to renovating their main mosque, etc.<sup>28</sup>

### C. *A Worrying Regional Context*

The model remains strong, but religious coexistence should not be taken for granted. The regional context, marked by radicalisation of religious discourse from some quarters and a rise of violent extremism that hit Burkina’s capital in January 2016, suggests caution.

The 15 January 2016 terrorist attacks, the first in Ouagadougou, came as a major shock, even though the threat had been palpable for at least several months. The statement issued by the Federation of Islamic Associations in Burkina (FAIB) condemning the attacks showed that Muslims refused to be associated with violence, but also revealed their fear of this conflation.<sup>29</sup> Although the attacks fostered solidarity

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Many young people who demonstrated against President Blaise Compaoré’s attempts to amend the constitution in October 2014, many of whom were born after his death in 1987, claim to follow Sankarism.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interviews, deputy, minister, Ouagadougou, April 2016. Some people complain about the hypocrisy of religious leaders who say they believe in dialogue. Moreover, some religious leaders tend to proselytise and defend the followers of their own religion. Crisis Group interviews, members of civil society, Ouagadougou, Fada N’Gourma; young Protestant, Dédougou, April 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, February 2015; Bobo-Dioulasso, July 2015, January 2016. “Affaire Charlie Hebdo: musulmans et chrétiens récitent les mêmes versets à Bobo”, *L’Observateur*, 25 January 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interviews, JEC, AEEMB and UGBB members, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016. A student in Dédougou told Crisis Group that students from all faiths helped Muslims arrange a prayer area and that all agreed to pause classes at 4pm for Muslim prayer. Crisis Group interview, student, Dédougou, April 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interviews, minister, Dori; Christian leader, Dédougou; Muslim representatives, Fada, April 2016.

<sup>29</sup> “Déclaration de la Fédération des associations islamiques du Burkina (FAIB) relative aux attaques terroristes au Burkina Faso”, 17 January 2016. A Muslim student told Crisis Group that Muslims had to condemn the attacks to avoid greater stigmatisation. Crisis Group interview, AEEMB member, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

between Burkinabè, who all characterised the attacks as contrary to Islam, there were instances of verbal harassment against Muslims. These incidents remained rare, but caused concern and prompted the government to issue a statement calling on citizens to be sensible.<sup>30</sup>

Most Muslims interviewed after the attacks knew at least one person who had been stigmatised, particularly those wearing visible religious signs (beards, skull caps and short trousers for men, full-face veil for women).<sup>31</sup> Some said that the security forces did not react strongly enough to these incidents and even that some police officers and gendarmes discriminate against Muslims because of their physical appearance.<sup>32</sup> A Muslim women representative said that on the day after the attacks, schoolchildren were pointing fingers at Muslim classmates.<sup>33</sup> Most Muslim interviewees denounced the harmful role played by the media. They said the use of the words “jihadists” and “Islamists”, which are general terms for Islamic concepts, to refer to terrorists implicitly accuse the entire Muslim community.<sup>34</sup>

These were isolated cases, but terrorism is a new phenomenon in Burkina and the climate of distrust that it inevitably generates could pose a long-term threat to peaceful coexistence. Crisis Group interviews with Christian and Muslim youth and leaders revealed fears that fundamentalist Islam and extremism might affect Burkina (see section IV.A).<sup>35</sup> Many were alarmed at the upsurge in religiosity among Muslims, and at the real or perceived sympathy toward violence of a small minority of Muslims. In Dori, a Christian representative said that some Muslims in the town rejoiced when churches were burned down in Niger in January 2015.<sup>36</sup> Muslims, for their part, sometimes feel that Christians, particularly Protestants, want to convert them and that the government is not always neutral, although there is no evidence of this.

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<sup>30</sup> “Attaque terroriste: des Burkinabè, en colère, agressent des personnes portant barbes”, Xinhua, 18 January 2016. A second statement was issued two months after the attacks, demonstrating continued concern. “Attaques terroristes au Burkina: le gouvernement s’inquiète d’actes de stigmatisation”, Burkina24 ([www.burkina24.com](http://www.burkina24.com)), 9 March 2016. For example, an interviewee said his wife, who was wearing a full-face veil, was harassed when she stopped at a red traffic light while riding her motorbike. Another mentioned the case of an acquaintance wearing a full-face veil who was booed in a public place. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders and youth, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders and youth, Ouagadougou, January 2016, Ouahigouya, April 2016. Some Muslims complain they have been treated differently since the attacks, for example at hospitals. They say that doctors are reluctant to provide care to women wearing full-face veils or insist that they take their veils off when they bring their children to receive health care. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Dédougou, April 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016; Muslim leaders, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muslim women representative, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim youth and leaders, AEEMB member, Ouagadougou, January 2016; Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interviews, ministers, Catholic representative, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016, Dédougou, April 2016; Muslim leader and customary chief, Kaya, April 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interview, Christian representative, Dori, April 2016.

### III. State and Religion: Frustrations

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In addition to the new context of terrorism, the government faces the challenge of maintaining its neutrality in a multi-faith country where religion is increasingly visible and assertive. Muslims have long been poorly represented among the political and administrative elites and were initially not particularly interested in politics, but that has changed. A researcher explained that the “historical contract” between the communities, according to which politics was traditionally reserved for Christians while Muslims dominated trade and business, has been broken.<sup>37</sup> These changes have led to frustration among some Muslims, who are conscious they form a majority of the population.

These longstanding frustrations could be amplified in the current context. Muslim leaders have been better organised since the FAIB was formed in 2005 and are increasingly expressing their grievances, even though they largely remain a taboo. Muslims have raised these issues at the political level in recent years, for example at the Consultative Council on Political Reform in 2011 and at the forum on secularism in September 2012, but no comprehensive solution has been found.<sup>38</sup>

#### A. *The Emergence of Muslim Demands*

Muslim demands are addressed to the government and the administration, and thus remain within a legal framework. Muslim leaders are not calling into question the peaceful religious coexistence, but are demanding even-handed treatment by a secular state that should regard all religions equally.<sup>39</sup> Muslims are conscious that they form a majority of the population and they believe that the authorities do not always properly take their interests into account. Many interviewees insisted that it is a demand for justice.<sup>40</sup>

These grievances are the product of a collective vision of Muslim interests: beyond individuals, Muslims’ common faith makes them into a community. This feeling is strengthened among some by the perception that they are persecuted throughout the world and are victims of Western intervention, terrorism and their repercussions.<sup>41</sup> Young Burkinabè Muslims increasingly see their grievances against the state through this global lens, which carries the danger of exacerbating tensions. Some Muslim leaders confessed that they are under the impression that the government is deliberately trying to harm Islam and promote Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Most interviewees did however acknowledge that the imbalanced makeup of the elites is a legacy of colonisation and not the result of official policy, and that the government has shown willingness to respond to pending issues. Nevertheless, many believe that more should be done.

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<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>38</sup> For example, “Propositions de réformes pour l’enracinement de la démocratie et d’une citoyenneté responsable”, contribution by FAIB, 16 May 2011, document provided to Crisis Group.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of the Centre for Islamic Study, Research and Training (CERFI), Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January, April 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

Although this imbalance is not the result of official policy to discriminate against Muslims, the resulting frustration can be dangerous. Unless the authorities start to remedy the situation, some Muslims could feel it is no longer worth talking to the government and turn to other ways of expressing themselves.<sup>43</sup> For the moment, there is no sign that such a trend is emerging, but the sense of marginalisation felt by some communities may lead to problems.<sup>44</sup>

The question was posed more acutely during the transition that followed the October 2014 downfall of Blaise Compaoré. The creation of transitional institutions provoked friction. Although he was seen as the army's candidate, the transitional president, Michel Kafando, was initially the choice of the Catholic Church.<sup>45</sup> A Muslim leader told Crisis Group that Muslim representatives firmly rejected the idea of appointing the Archbishop of Bobo-Dioulasso, Monseigneur Paul Ouédraogo, as head of the transition. "Fortunately, Cherif Sy [president of the transitional parliament] is a Muslim".<sup>46</sup> Muslims requested parity with Christians for posts in the transitional institutions, a demand that was neither feasible nor desirable.<sup>47</sup> In private, many people later deplored the fact that the prime minister, Isaac Zida, a Protestant, appointed many Protestants to posts in the administration. Even if these appointments were not driven by an evangelisation ideology, and were simply nepotism, they gave the impression that "you needed to be a Protestant to get appointed to a post".<sup>48</sup>

This critical discourse is not without consequences. In a country where religion is only a secondary badge of identity, formulating demands based on religious faith may give religion a more important role than it used to play. Politicising religion carries clear risks of hijacking and manipulation.<sup>49</sup> The Burkinabè seem to be aware of this. For example, the candidate to the November 2015 presidential election, Ablassé Ouédraogo, caused an outcry when he said he believed his Muslim faith gave him a better chance of winning.<sup>50</sup>

The government must respond to Muslim grievances while avoiding the dangerous pitfall of sectarianism. It is difficult to find a balance. Many interviewees, both Catholics and Protestants, insisted that the upsurge in identity-based demands might

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<sup>43</sup> Several interviewees highlighted the danger of allowing these frustrations to accumulate. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, February 2015, Bobo-Dioulasso, July 2015, Fada N'Gourma, April 2016; minister, researchers, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Young Muslims told Crisis Group that they are not giving full voice to their frustrations for the moment but that "they shouldn't be pushed around". Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè politician, Abidjan, August 2015; Muslim intellectual, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muslim leader, Ouagadougou, February 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, June 2016.

<sup>48</sup> These words, spoken by a young soldier in the former presidential guard, were reported to Crisis Group by an eminent Burkinabè political figure. Crisis Group interview, Ouagadougou, July 2015.

<sup>49</sup> In recent years, the Blaise Compaoré regime tended to manipulate religious leaders and take advantage of their divisions. The project of creating a Senate, with the secret aim of introducing an amendment to the constitution to allow Compaoré to stand again in the presidential election, had drawn support from some Muslim representatives who saw it as a means of gaining more political influence.

<sup>50</sup> "Burkina – Ablassé Ouédraogo: 'J'ai toutes mes chances à la présidentielle d'octobre'", *Jeune Afrique*, 8 June 2015.

disturb coexistence.<sup>51</sup> This warning betrays their fear of losing their status as the “dominant minority” and of seeing the rules of the game change if Muslims gain more political and administrative power.<sup>52</sup> However, most of them recognised the need to correct the imbalance in order to preserve social cohesion.<sup>53</sup>

## B. *A List of Grievances*

With time, demands have become more precise. During the November 2015 presidential election campaign, Muslim representatives presented candidates with a document entitled “Muslim concerns in Burkina Faso”.<sup>54</sup> These concerns can be divided into three categories: the visibility and representation of religious communities in public and political life; the administration’s treatment of religions; and the crucial issue of education, which is related to representation among the elites.

### 1. Public and political representation and profile

The grievance most frequently mentioned by interviewees concerned the representativeness of religious authorities relied upon to resolve political or social crises, or appointed to institutions. Usually, when the government requests the participation of religious leaders, each faith – Catholic, Protestant, Muslim – nominates a representative. Muslims deplore the fact that this formula allows them to have only one representative compared to two for Christians, even though Muslims form a majority of the population. They argue that while Catholics and Protestants form two branches of Christianity, Muslims are also divided into several denominations. This problem arose in Bobo-Dioulasso upon appointments to the special delegation, an administrative body designed to replace municipal authorities that were dissolved after Compaoré’s fall. The disagreement was quickly resolved by appointing a second Muslim representative. The same problem emerged in the Economic and Social Council, where it proved more difficult to resolve.<sup>55</sup>

The public profile of religions is also a cause of frustration. For the last two or three decades, religion has been playing an ever increasing role in public life. In a multi-faith country, this has resulted in competition between religions and between currents

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<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Catholic and Protestant representatives, Ouagadougou, Dédougou, April 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interview, priest, Ouagadougou, April 2016. The expression “dominant minority” was used in “Etats et minorités religieuses: les représentations des catholiques au Burkina Faso et au Sénégal”, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interviews, ministers, Ouagadougou, Kaya; Protestant representative, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>54</sup> “Despite the fact that Muslims are a majority of the population in Burkina, their real concerns are practically ignored by both the political class and public administration”. Extract from the document “Préoccupations des musulmans au Burkina Faso”, written by the Coordination of Islamic Associations of the West, document on file with Crisis Group. Crisis Group interview, Muslim representative, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>55</sup> The Economic and Social Council includes three representatives of traditional, religious and customary authorities. In addition to the customary chief, two religious representatives are appointed. Catholics and Protestants say it is difficult for them to appoint a joint representative because of the historical differences between the two faiths.



within each religion, leading to a race to build places of worship, quarrels over noise pollution, an increase in the number of religious media, etc.<sup>56</sup>

Some Muslim leaders believe that the airtime given to each religion on the state-owned Burkina Radio-Television (RTB) is not equitable. No evidence has been offered to support this claim. Some deplore the fact that government offices and streets are decorated to celebrate Christian holidays but not Muslim holidays.<sup>57</sup> There is no Tabaski tree equivalent to the Christmas tree but these are symbolic issues and it should not be difficult to find an adequate response. The government and public administration need to realise that such apparently insignificant details can fuel frustration. For example, school holidays are now called “quarterly holidays” rather than “Christmas holidays” or “Easter holidays”.<sup>58</sup>

## 2. Treatment of religions by the state and the administration

The constitution enshrines the secular nature of the Burkinabè state (article 31). Secularism does not have the same meaning as in France, however, though the French system inspired Burkina’s constitution. The state subsidises private faith-based education and Muslim pilgrimages, and the government often asks religious authorities to play a role in defusing social and political tensions.<sup>59</sup> Some Muslim representatives believe that Burkina’s form of secularism favours Christianity. An interviewee even mentioned a “double standards secularism” defined by its opposition to Islam.<sup>60</sup> Instead of importing a rigid form of secularism from the West, Burkina should find its own definition.

Muslims publicly expressed their frustration at the adoption of the continuous working day (7.30am to 3pm) in September 2015. They repeatedly asked for a meeting with the prime minister to point to the impossibility of attending Friday prayers if lunch breaks are only 30 minutes long, but the prime minister never received them. When the continuous working day was introduced, the Centre for Islamic Study, Research and Training (CERFI) published a strongly-worded open letter, reflecting the anger felt by many Muslims.<sup>61</sup> The government eventually agreed on a longer lunch break on Fridays, but this episode illustrates Muslims’ perception that secularism is defined by its opposition to Islam and that their interests carry little weight.

Another recurring problem concerns the allocation of plots of land for building places of worship when new housing estates are being developed. When local authori-

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<sup>56</sup> For example, see, Frederick Madore, “Islam, politique et sphère publique à Ouagadougou”, thesis, Laval University, 2013; and the work of Maud Saint-Lary.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim representative, journalist working for a faith-based media, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè citizens, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Sponsorship of Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca, the *Hadj*, often causes controversy. Christians deplore the fact that the government does not fund any Christian pilgrimages. Every year, there are arguments over the management of pilgrimage grants by Muslim associations and over the organisation of the pilgrimage. “Hadj 2015: Des agences de voyage demandent un audit”, *Le Pays*, 11 January 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim representatives, Ouahigouya, April 2016. For example, weekly holidays are Saturdays and Sundays, while the Muslim day of prayer is Friday.

<sup>61</sup> “Journée continue de travail: Le CERFI demande la prise en compte de la grande prière du vendredi”, *LeFaso.net* ([www.lefaso.net](http://www.lefaso.net)), 9 September 2015. Crisis Group interviews, CERFI member, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016. Created in 1989, CERFI is a Burkinabè association composed mainly of Francophone Muslim intellectuals.

ties allocate three plots of the same size for each community, Muslims point out that they are often more numerous than Christians. Tensions also arise when local authorities only allocate one plot of land for all three religions to share.<sup>62</sup> Disputes around the allocation of land for the construction of places of worship are common.

As in many other countries, problems have emerged in relation to wearing the veil. The controversy over the partial veil (hijab) in France prompted a debate in Burkina. The hijab is generally authorised in private and state schools but veiled girls are sometimes stigmatised and even expelled from school.<sup>63</sup> In 2012, an imam exposed the discrimination faced by Muslim women wearing the hijab at entrance examinations for the civil service.<sup>64</sup> These controversies reinforce the feelings of some Muslims that secularism is defined by its opposition to Islam and that their own interests count for little.

The full-face veil (niqab) poses a particular problem in the new context of terrorism. In December 2015, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) recommended member states to ban the niqab in public places on security grounds.<sup>65</sup> This worries some Burkinabè Muslims, especially followers of fundamentalist Islam, who fear that the government will ban the niqab under the pretext of security. This concern is another illustration of the sense of victimisation felt by some Muslims.<sup>66</sup>

### 3. The modernisation of Franco-Arab education

One important demand from Muslims concerns their underrepresentation among the political and administrative elites. Some interviewees mentioned the small number of Muslim government ministers as an illustration of the problem.<sup>67</sup> This is not the result of government policy but is due to historical factors, disparities in the education system and the weakness of Franco-Arab education, which has developed and now attracts many Muslim children, while others attend state or private Christian schools.

According to a researcher, 15 to 20 per cent of children in Burkina attend Franco-Arab or Quranic schools.<sup>68</sup> There are more than 1,700 Franco-Arab schools in the

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<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muslim representative, Bobo-Dioulasso, young Muslim, Ouagadougou, January 2016. In Orodara, in the west of the country, a dispute over land between Muslims and animists led to the destruction of the Sunni Movement's mosque in July 2016. "La mosquée des sunnites de Orodara a été saccagée", *LeFaso.net*, 16 July 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group interview, AEEMB member, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Imam Ismaël Tiendrébéogo, "Du port du voile lors des concours", *L'Observateur Paalga* ([www.lefaso.net](http://www.lefaso.net)), 21 May 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Final Communiqué, 48th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, Abuja, 16-17 December 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Sunni Movement members, Ouagadougou, January 2016. Some young Muslims are convinced that the government claimed women were involved in the 15 January terrorist attacks to justify the ban on niqab. Crisis Group interviews, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim women representative, Ouagadougou; Muslim representatives, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, Ouagadougou, April 2016. Quranic schools are exclusively dedicated to teaching the Quran. Their pupils often endure poor living conditions and are reduced to begging.

country, representing around 70 per cent of private education.<sup>69</sup> The schools were born out of the need to adapt Quranic education to modern-day demands, to allow children to learn about Islam while being prepared for the job market. The schools provide courses in Arabic, religion and general subjects.

However, Franco-Arab schools do not always successfully combine Islamic education with the need to teach general subjects that would give children the same chance of graduating, passing the civil service entrance examinations or finding a job. The schools often lack resources; curricula and diplomas vary from one school to another and fail to follow the state's program; the level of French is weak; teachers are not always well-trained; their wages are often below average; and the textbooks received from Arab countries do not correspond to local realities.

The government has begun to deal with this problem. The Support for Primary Bilingual Franco-Arab Education Project (PREFA), a CFA7.5-billion (€11.5 million) project launched in 2015 by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), subsidises some schools and is building new schools in seven regions and 21 provinces.<sup>70</sup> In 2015, the government and the FAIB signed an agreement on a CFA400-million (€610,000) state subsidy per year for three years in the form of supplementary payments to 555 teachers. The government has also recruited 40 Franco-Arab schools graduates for a teacher training program, which will give them jobs and staff the schools with competent teachers.<sup>71</sup> There has been some progress on harmonising curricula, but much remains to be done. Joint curricula are currently being prepared, government-designed Arabic textbooks have been distributed to some schools and some examinations are now held jointly.<sup>72</sup>

The government does not bear sole responsibility for the slow pace of progress; Franco-Arab school directors are sometimes reluctant to conform to standards and some of them do not see improving the employment prospects of their pupils as a priority. It is also difficult for the government to act effectively given that it must negotiate with various organisations – each Islamic association has its own schools and curricula, often funded by Arab donors.

Students who received scholarships to study in Arab countries also struggle to find jobs when they return, even those with degrees in subjects like medicine, law and engineering. Their command of the French language is not always strong enough for passing civil service examinations or obtaining highly qualified jobs in the private sector, and their diplomas are not always recognised despite the existence of a National Degree Equivalence Commission. They are not well informed about the procedures they need to follow, and the negative image of Franco-Arab education and Arab universities means that the administration is sometimes reluctant

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<sup>69</sup> “Ecoles franco-arabes au Burkina: état des lieux et difficultés d’insertion des diplômés”, LeFaso.net, 29 May 2013. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim representatives, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; civil servants, Ouagadougou, April 2016. “Plaidoyer pour une réforme de l’enseignement franco-arabe au Burkina”, National Democratic Institute CEPPS program, July 2013. As an illustration, private schools account for about one fifth of all schools (2,279 private schools out of a total of 11,545 schools in Burkina). “Etablissements d’enseignement privé: L’Etat ouvre la voie au désordre”, LeFaso.net, 21 November 2012. However, these figures must be treated with caution because there are probably many unaccredited and unregistered private schools.

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Franco-Arab school director, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; civil servants, Ouagadougou, April 2016. See the national education ministry website, <http://bit.ly/1rNuUOy>.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interviews, civil servants, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

to help them. Graduates educated in Arabic feel devalued because they have studied at an Arab university. Marginalising these young graduates presents clear risks.<sup>73</sup>

The reform of Franco-Arab education, which needs significant financial resources, will not happen overnight. However, the lack of communication on efforts to modernise this system seems to constitute the main obstacle. Muslim interviewees said that “the government does nothing for our schools”,<sup>74</sup> while others recognised that efforts have been made without knowing exactly what they consist of. Some said the system of subsidies awarded to private schools is unfair and does not reflect the fact that Muslims form the majority of the population. Few were aware that the government owes Catholic schools CFA2.9 billion (€4.4 million) for subsidies promised but not paid for in years.<sup>75</sup>

Apart from the Franco-Arab system, there is another problem related to education. In Bobo-Dioulasso, some pupils are sent to private schools that have agreements with the government because state secondary schools lack capacity. Some Muslim parents are uncomfortable with the idea of sending their children to Catholic or Protestant schools for fear that attempts will be made to convert them.<sup>76</sup> An interviewee wondered whether the government perhaps wanted to “force evangelisation” on pupils, saying they have to go to the schools they are assigned to and that some schools refuse to exempt them from religious education and prayers.<sup>77</sup>

### C. *Divides within the Muslim Community*

Burkina’s Muslim community is not a monolithic entity and its members have diverse practices and perceptions. The many Islamic associations have not always had friendly relations and the gap between the younger generation and the old guard continues to grow. These divides sometimes make it difficult to address Muslims’ demands.

Islam in Burkina is riven by ideological differences and personal rivalries, including within each branch. The first attempt to unite Muslims produced the Muslim Community of Upper Volta (now the CMBF) in 1962, but this organisation had to deal with personal rivalries and financial scandals. It remains one of the major Muslim associations, along with the Tijanyyia, Burkina Faso’s main Sufi branch, the Sunni Movement, which represents the Wahhabi tendency, and Ittihad Islami, a Tijanyyia branch that aims to unite all Muslims.

The main division within the Muslim community is between Sufi Muslims on the one hand, and Wahhabis and Salafis on the other, who are mainly represented in Burkina by the Sunni Movement. The latter established themselves in the country in

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<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muslim intellectual, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016. Several studies have been published on this issue, for example, Sylvie Bredeloup, “Etudiants arabophones de retour à Ouagadougou cherchent désespérément reconnaissance”, *L’Année du Maghreb*, vol. 11 (2014).

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Fada N’Gourma, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim intellectual, young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016; civil servants, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interviews, director and former director of Franco-Arab schools, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interview, former director of a Franco-Arab school, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

the 1970s, but cohabitation with the other branches has never been easy.<sup>78</sup> Members of the Sunni Movement and Sufi branches often distrust each other: the former believe the latter are “bad” Muslims, who tarnish Islam with African traditions that do not conform to the life of the Prophet, while Sufis describe members of the Sunni Movement as radicals.<sup>79</sup> So-called modernist and reformist movements, combining Saudi-inspired Islam and an African identity appeared later, with the creation of the AEEMB and the CERFI in the 1980s.

Created in 2005 to strengthen unity, the Burkina Federation of Islamic Associations (FAIB) suffers from these ideological differences but also from personal rivalries. This is especially so after the death of wealthy businessman Oumarou Kanazoé in 2011, an illiterate Muslim who managed to keep the community unified largely thanks to his charisma and personal fortune.<sup>80</sup> Ten years passed before the federation organised its first congress, in June 2015. Kanazoé’s death left the Muslim community without a leader. After many quarrels, FAIB members finally agreed that the federation should be led by a presidium consisting of representatives of the four major member associations (CMBF, Sunni Movement, Tijanyyia and Ittihad), with a rotating annual presidency. A sign of its weakness is that the federation does not have local representation. The FAIB still has a long way to go before Muslims, especially young people, see it as a useful tool to defend their interests.<sup>81</sup>

Members of Muslim youth associations feel their representatives do not sufficiently defend their interests. They believe that the old guard that dominates the FAIB is irrelevant and incapable of making their voice heard, in addition to being corrupt and manipulated by political authorities. Therefore, in 2013, the CERFI and the AEEMB expressed their disapproval following the FAIB’s public statement in favour of creating a Senate.<sup>82</sup> This episode showed the widening gap between older Muslims, who still control most Muslim associations, and young people, who want to play a role in the decision-making process. The closeness of some Muslim leaders to the old regime has discredited them in the eyes of the youth.<sup>83</sup>

This gap could be dangerous because older Muslims are generally inclined to preserve tradition, including peaceful religious coexistence, while young Muslims may be tempted to question the status quo if they feel that their interests are not taken

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<sup>78</sup> For example, see Maïmouna Koné Dao, “Implantation et influence du wahhabisme au Burkina Faso de 1963 à 2002”, in Muriel Gomez-Perez, *L’islam politique au sud du Sahara* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim representative, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; Sunni Movement member, Dori, Ouagadougou, Muslim leader, Ouagadougou, April 2016. For example, the tension is palpable every year with the approach of Maouloud, when Sufis celebrate the Prophet’s birthday, a practice that Wahhabis believe does not conform to Islam. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>80</sup> The government allegedly supported the creation of the FAIB so as to have a single Muslim interlocutor. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker of an Islamic organisation, researcher, Ouagadougou, January 2016. For more on Oumarou Kanazoé, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°205, *With or Without Blaise Compaoré: Times of Uncertainty*, 22 July 2013, footnote 91, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> A young Muslim used the term “empty shell”. Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leader, young Muslim, Ouagadougou, January 2016. To compensate for the lack of local representation, Muslims in Bobo-Dioulasso formed the Coordination of Islamic Associations in the West. Crisis Group interview, Muslim leader, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>82</sup> “Sénat: L’AEEMB et le CERFI se démarquent des propos de Souleymane Compaoré”, *LeFaso.net*, 16 September 2013. See footnote 49.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim women representative, young Muslim, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, January and April 2016.

into account. Many Muslim leaders told Crisis Group that while their ancestors and they have accepted the underrepresentation of Muslims, young people are less patient.<sup>84</sup> This generational divide partly explains why Wahhabism is spreading and attracting young Muslims, especially in urban areas.

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<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, February 2015; Fada, April 2016; young Muslims, Ouagadougou, January 2016; researcher, minister, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

## IV. Changes in Religious Behaviours?

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Religious coexistence and the government's management of religious diversity provide interesting examples for countries facing tension caused by religious radicalisation and the rise of violent extremism. Studying the relationship between the state and religion requires examining changes in individual religious behaviours, which can have an impact on social relations. The rise of fundamentalist Islam in several African countries has not spared Burkina and can sometimes disturb the balance between communities. The phenomenon of revivalist "born-again" Protestant Churches is not as widespread in Burkina as it is in other African countries, but Protestantism is booming.

### A. *The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism*

In the debate on radicalisation and violent extremism, two often used but poorly defined concepts, it is important to distinguish the rise of fundamentalist Islam from the propensity to resort to violence – two very distinct phenomena. An increase in religiosity does not necessarily lead to violence. Quietist currents preach a return to strict Islamic practices but proscribe all forms of violence to achieve this end. The roots of violence are not necessarily to be found in the rise of religiosity: perpetrators may already be involved in crime, others may resort to violence to defend socio-economic and financial interests or because of local grievances.<sup>85</sup> However, even if they do not lead to violence, changes in religious behaviours can have an impact on relations between communities and disturb social cohesion.

In Burkina, there is a trend toward an increase in religiosity, with visible signs in the case of Muslims: change in clothing habits (more common use of the full-face veil for women; short trousers, skull caps and beards for men); change in eating habits; increase in the number of mosques, Quranic and Franco-Arab schools; creation of informal prayer and study rooms on university campus, etc. These changes seem particularly evident on the Ouagadougou university campus: a professor said that his lecture theatre empties in time for prayers at 4pm and that some Muslims do not want to attend the *grins* (informal discussion groups for young people) with non-Muslims – something that would have been unthinkable just ten years ago.<sup>86</sup>

These trends are clearer in urban than in rural areas, where people are more conservative. In towns, young people are more open to ideas imported from abroad and less constrained by traditions, family and community rules.<sup>87</sup> However, the rise of fundamentalist Islam, sometimes advanced by foreign preachers, can also challenge

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<sup>85</sup> See Crisis Group Special Report, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interviews, teachers, members of student associations, Ouagadougou, April 2016. See also Augustin Loada, Peter Romaniuk, "Preventing violent extremism in Burkina Faso. Toward national resilience amid regional insecurity", Global Center on Cooperative Security, June 2014. The 2016 update of this study concluded that the factors enabling resilience to violent extremism still exist but have been eroded. One of the concerns mentioned in the study is the perception of a "pro-Christian" state by some Burkinabè Muslims. Conference on the prevention of violent extremism, organised by the MATDSI and the Danish embassy, Ouagadougou, 9 June 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, researcher, Ouagadougou; priest, Gourcy, April 2016.

traditions in rural areas.<sup>88</sup> The regions along the borders with Mali and Niger, in particular, cannot be entirely impermeable to changes in those countries.<sup>89</sup>

Several studies examine the influence of Wahhabism and reformism in Burkina Faso.<sup>90</sup> The Sunni Movement, the association that represents this tendency, increasingly attracts Muslims for several reasons.<sup>91</sup> It is fairly well organised and structured, with a national office and regional and provincial representatives; it gives young people the place they deserve, often promoting young imams and preachers; and its intellectuals and scholars, who are fluent in Arabic, give it an aura of prestige.<sup>92</sup>

Its declared aim of promoting a pure version of Islam and countering the deterioration in social morals and the corruption of the elites resonates with many Muslims.<sup>93</sup> Confessional and social media, which have played an important role in urban areas during the October 2014 uprising, ensure the dissemination of this message. In addition, unemployment and job insecurity make promises of financial aid attractive. Several interviewees said that “the Sunnis” offer to help young people with their professional endeavours if they adopt their practices.<sup>94</sup>

However, the rise of fundamentalist Islam is only of concern if it changes social relations, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims. And that may well be the case. New religious practices can have a big impact on the relations between neighbours. For example, some Muslims no longer share food with their Christian neighbours at Christmas or Easter and forbid mixed marriages, which are very common in Burkina. Some interviewees expressed concerns about a relative or neighbour who became a “Sunni” and distanced themselves from their family circles.<sup>95</sup>

One of the main characteristics of Wahhabism and reformism in West Africa is the belief that “true Islam” requires the rejection of African traditions preserved by Sufism, such as funeral rites, animal sacrifices, the use of rosaries during prayers,

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<sup>88</sup> An analyst explained that practices are changing even in traditionally animist Senoufo country (south-eastern Burkina, near the border with Côte d’Ivoire). Crisis Group interview, analyst, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Some population groups in these areas (the north and west of Burkina) could be particularly vulnerable to penetration by certain ideas and movements, notably the Fulanis and the Tuareg Bella, because of the presence of many Fulanis and Tuaregs in groups active in Mali. Crisis Group interviews, deputies, Ouagadougou; priest, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>90</sup> For definitions of these terms, see Maud Saint-Lary, “Du wahhabisme aux réformes génériques”, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, no. 206-207, vol. 2 (2012). For more on Wahhabism in Burkina, see “Implantation et influence du wahhabisme au Burkina Faso de 1963 à 2002”, *op. cit.* For lack of reliable statistics, it is difficult to estimate the number of Muslims who practice fundamentalist Islam, all the more so as there are a range of practices between Sufi and Wahhabi Islam. Depending on the interviewees and the locality, estimates vary between 10 and 30 per cent of Muslims. Crisis Group interviews, young Muslim, Ouagadougou; Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; Muslim citizen, priest, Ouahigouya, Muslim leader, Kaya, April 2016.

<sup>91</sup> The Sunni Movement does not claim to be either Wahhabi or Salafist. It believes that Islam is unique and there are no currents, hence the name “Sunni”. Crisis Group interview, Sunni Movement leaders, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Muslim, Ouagadougou, January 2016; Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016, Kaya, April 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interview, ONAFAR member, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interviews, ministers, Protestant leaders, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016; Muslim leader, Kaya, Muslim citizen, Fada N’Gourma, April 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interviews, minister, Ouagadougou; civil servants, Fada N’Gourma and Dori; customary chief, Kaya, April 2016.



the use of amulets and other talismans and the veneration of Sufi saints. Many of these traditions have been preserved by the followers of all religions and bring them closer together.

An intolerant discourse toward non-Muslims, though it appears marginal, does exist. Some fundamentalist versions of Islam distrust non-Muslims and non-practising Muslims, whom they call “heathens”. This discourse goes hand-in-hand with anti-Western rhetoric, which makes perfect sense in a regional and international context marked by military interventions perceived as manifestations of the West’s desire to destroy Islam. This rhetoric appeals to some young Muslims.<sup>96</sup> Christianity is presented as a Western religion and this carries the risk of creating divisions between Burkinabè citizens. If these intolerant sermons succeed in reaching and convincing more than a minority, they could eventually pose a threat to religious coexistence.<sup>97</sup>

Several Muslim leaders have expressed concerns about these trends and their distrust of the Sunni Movement. However, the latter is not a homogeneous group. Interviewees in Ouahigouya and Bobo-Dioulasso deplored that the Sunni Movement hardly participates in interfaith dialogue and that some of its members preach ideas that are incompatible with tolerance.<sup>98</sup> But in Dori, the Sunni Movement participates in interfaith dialogue.<sup>99</sup> It therefore seems that a minor radical tendency shuns contact with others, an attitude that is certainly not restricted to members of the Sunni Movement.<sup>100</sup>

Some Muslim leaders deplored foreign influence, especially that of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.<sup>101</sup> Although it is impossible to have a precise idea of the amount of money poured by Gulf countries, including through humanitarian aid, it is certainly happening and it leads to growing ideological and cultural influence of these countries. Burkinabè scholars and preachers trained in the Gulf sometimes return home promoting practices and ideas far removed from the realities of peaceful coexistence in Burkina. Once again, if these ideas find support, it could threaten the balance between religious communities.

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<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group interview, customary chief, Kaya, April 2016.

<sup>97</sup> For example, a Protestant told Crisis Group that he had heard a cassette played at a market inciting Muslims to expel Christians from their courtyards. Another interviewee told how on the day after the January 2016 terrorist attacks, an imam said that casualties at the Cappuccino café deserved to die if they were drinking alcohol. Crisis Group interviews, Protestants, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016; priest, Ouahigouya, April 2016. Sunni Movement members sometimes feel that they are being asked to renounce some of their practices in the name of interfaith dialogue. For example, it is forbidden for men to shake women’s hands, while handshaking is the most common greeting in West Africa. Crisis Group interviews, Sunni Movement members, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group interview, customary chief, Dori, April 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Isolated cases confirm that Burkina is not immune to radical ideas. An imam who reportedly provided accommodation for individuals arriving from Mali was arrested in the west. This arrest is said to have provoked the October 2015 attack on the Samorogouan gendarmerie post. A Sunni Movement member in a western town close to the border with Mali was arrested and taken to Ouagadougou prison. An imam in Ouagadougou was arrested following the January 2016 terrorist attacks after arms were found in his home. Crisis Group interviews, young Muslim, civil society activist, Ouagadougou, Muslim intellectual, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Islamic NGO employee, Muslim leaders, Ouagadougou, January and April 2016.

For example, an NGO called Qatar Charity built 496 mosques, 60 wells, 21 multi-service complexes, five schools and eighteen health centres between 2009 and 2015.<sup>102</sup> However, the view of Islamic NGOs as instruments for the dissemination of fundamentalist Islam from the Gulf countries needs qualifying. Building a school or a health centre does not necessarily result in the conversion of the children or patients, all the more so as these NGOs respond to a genuine social need that stems from the government's inability to provide basic services to the entire population.<sup>103</sup>

These trends are all the more worrying given that the government has little control over religious discourse. Officially, no place of worship can be built without administrative authorisation, but individuals do create secret mosques, for example by converting their yard into a prayer room.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, as in many other countries, it is difficult for the government to monitor the content of sermons or the ideas that circulate in mosques or in private. Religious discourse may therefore become radical without it being possible to notice it or assess the extent to which this is the case. The Sunni Movement says it exercises strict control over the sermons preached in its mosques, by asking all imams and preachers to specify their content in advance. That does not seem to be the case in the Tijanyya, which is much less organised.<sup>105</sup>

However, stigmatising an entire category of Muslims who choose a more fundamentalist religious practice should be avoided; it would be the best way to radicalise some and encourage violence. Some Muslims already feel stigmatised because of terrorism (see section II.C). Changes in religious behaviours and the increase in religiosity among Muslims are only dangerous if they cause a breakdown in social relations and encourage communities to withdraw into themselves.

## B. *Revivalist Churches: A Marginal Phenomenon*

The increase in religiosity does not apply exclusively to Muslims; it is part of a general trend toward more dynamic religious practice that also involves Christians, particularly Protestants. In several African countries, new Protestant churches, the so-called "born-again" churches, are booming.<sup>106</sup> In Burkina, where traditional Protestant churches are in the majority, this phenomenon remains marginal.

Protestantism is the religion with the least number of followers in Burkina Faso, but it is growing quickly. Between 1960 and 2006, the increase in the number of Protestants was five times more important than the increase in the number of Muslims and twice as high as for Catholics.<sup>107</sup> The Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions (FEME), the main Protestant organisation in Burkina, has fourteen

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<sup>102</sup> Document supplied to Crisis Group by Qatar Charity. Crisis Group interview, Qatar Charity employee, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>103</sup> For example, imams who officiate at the mosques built by Qatar Charity for the CERFI are selected by the latter and not by the NGO. Qatar Charity says that it builds mosques but does not intervene in their management. Crisis Group interviews, CERFI member, Ouagadougou, January 2016; Qatar Charity employee, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Muslim leaders, Bobo-Dioulasso, January 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Sunni Movement representative and scholar, Ouagadougou; Muslim citizen, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>106</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> Katrin Langewiesche, "Le dialogue interreligieux au service du développement", *Bulletin de l'APAD*, no. 33 (2011). For statistics on Protestant Churches, see "Eglises et missions évangéliques du Burkina: Compassion internationale fait l'autopsie", *Sidwaya*, 18 July 2013.

member churches, but there are around 120 others.<sup>108</sup> The Church of Assemblies of God is the largest denomination and comprises 70 to 80 per cent of Burkina's Protestants. It faces competition from new churches, such as the International Evangelisation Centre (CIE), led by charismatic minister Mamadou Philippe Karambiri.<sup>109</sup>

New Protestant churches sometimes promote a discourse that is far removed from coexistence. In Burkina, such discourse seems to be marginal, but there are worrying signs. Protestantism is based on the idea that followers who join the path of God are given salvation. The discourse is sometimes Manichaean, offering a dual interpretation of the world as being divided into good and evil.<sup>110</sup> Protestantism is completely opposed to African tradition, which is a cornerstone of social cohesion in Burkina (see section II.B). The prohibition of mixed marriages, although not always respected, can also prejudice social relations.<sup>111</sup> Conversions often lead to family quarrels, but these are generally settled with time.

Proselytism, often through humanitarian action, holds an important place in certain Protestant associations, because conversion leads to salvation. Proselytism sometimes provokes fear in other communities. According to a Catholic leader in Dédougou, Protestants approach children on their way to catechism classes and offer them money to come to their church.<sup>112</sup>

Some interviewees deplored the fact that Protestants are sometimes reluctant to participate in interfaith dialogue. For example, in Dori, they refuse to formally join the Fraternal Union of Believers (UFC), founded in 1969 by Catholics and Muslims to promote humanitarian action and religious tolerance, even though they occasionally collaborate with the association.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to a discourse that is traditionally unfavourable to Catholicism, some churches and individuals privately equate Islam with terrorism, fuelling distrust toward Muslims. This discourse is more present in the new churches, which often come from neighbouring countries, like the Winner's Chapel of Nigeria. The more traditional Protestant denominations have deeper roots in Burkina's religious landscape and more rarely foster such rhetoric.<sup>114</sup> A speech that promotes an inward-looking vision can disturb the balance between communities, even if it does not call for violence.

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<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group interview, Protestant women representative, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>109</sup> The CIE presents the typical profile of the new churches. It adopts a proselytising discourse that promises salvation, relies on the minister's personality, has large financial resources and uses modern media (the CIE has its own television channel, Impact TV).

<sup>110</sup> Crisis Group interview, ONAFAR member, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>111</sup> A minister told Crisis Group that Protestantism does not tolerate mixed marriages but if two people truly love each other, there is no reason to stop them being together. Crisis Group interview, minister, Ouahigouya, April 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Crisis Group interview, catholic leader, Dédougou, April 2016. A young Protestant told Crisis Group that an NGO using church premises provides childcare for all but secretly aims to convert patients to Protestantism. Crisis Group interview, young Protestant, Dédougou, April 2016. A Muslim representative deplored how families quarrel when Muslim women and children, who are looked after by an NGO on a weekly basis, say they want to convert to Protestantism. Crisis Group interview, Muslim representative, Kaya, April 2016.

<sup>113</sup> A minister told Crisis Group that Protestants refuse to join the UFC because its internal rules proscribe proselytism, which is the duty of all Protestants. Crisis Group interview, minister, Dori, April 2016. A student in Dédougou said that Muslims and Catholics often work together but Protestants are less involved. Crisis Group interview, student, Dédougou, April 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Crisis Group interview, Catholic representative, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

These alarming signs seem isolated for the moment. All interviewees said that the growth of radical Protestantism is much less pronounced in Burkina than in other African countries. It does not at present seem likely that this discourse will have more than a minimal impact.<sup>115</sup> However, vigilance is still required, all the more so because it is easy to create a new church (any individual can set up a church) and build new places of worship. The government and the FEME may find it difficult to keep the discourse under control.

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<sup>115</sup> All interviewees confirmed that the phenomenon of revivalist churches is not as widespread in Burkina as it is in other countries, such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, etc. Crisis Group interviews, Protestants, young Protestants, Ouagadougou, April 2016; journalist, civil society activist, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

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## **V. Toward a Better Balance for Lasting Peaceful Coexistence**

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Burkina's model of religious coexistence faces the challenge of adapting to a new regional environment and changes in relations between different communities. There is no immediate threat to this model: Burkina remains a good example of religious tolerance. It would be tempting to ignore the growing difficulties for fear that opening a discussion about the relationship between the state and religion might lead to the very outcome that it is hoping to avoid. Opening a public debate on religion, particularly about the government's treatment of religions and representation of the different communities within the administration, and then offering solutions, could give religious identity more weight and even exacerbate differences. The risk of political hijacking or manipulation should not be underestimated.

It is nevertheless more dangerous to continue to ignore problems that are becoming increasingly clear. Rather than turning a blind eye, it would be better to accept and anticipate the risk and take the initiative to avoid the situation deteriorating if circumstances were to change rapidly. The dangers of opening the debate should not be ignored, but if they are known and expected, they can be mitigated. If the issue is dealt with cautiously, in the spirit of seeking dialogue and balance, it may be possible to gradually identify solutions that would reduce emerging frustrations. Burkina's political class has often shown remarkable capacity to reach compromise, even in the most difficult situations. The authorities and religious leaders could take several measures to correct the inadequacies that are beginning to erode the country's model of religious tolerance so as to ensure its continued existence.

### *A. Improving Representation within the Elite*

The underrepresentation of Muslims among the political and administrative elite is not due to deliberate discrimination; rather, it is the outcome of history and of the quality gap between Franco-Arab education and Christian and state schools. In order to respond to frustrations without creating new ones or stigmatising communities, the roots of the problem must be addressed. Quotas are by no means an appropriate fix. They rarely resolve the problem and could lead to dangerous developments in Burkina.

The government must pursue efforts to reform and modernise Franco-Arab schools, especially by requiring higher standards in the French language and introducing a national curriculum for all Franco-Arab schools. This clearly necessitates the cooperation of Muslim leaders and school directors, who must recognise that Islamic education is not incompatible with acquiring academic background and reconcile these objectives. The authorities must be more rigorous and close down schools that refuse to respect the criteria. Muslim leaders must also work with the administration to better communicate to the public on efforts to modernise Franco-Arab education. That would send a positive message to young Muslims and show them that the government is taking their interests into account.

To mitigate the feeling of social exclusion experienced by graduates educated in Arabic, the government should facilitate access to degree equivalence, including by ensuring that students are well informed about the procedures to follow; tackle the prejudiced perceptions within the administration about Arab education; create French language training centres for graduates educated in Arabic to add value to

their degrees and enable them to find a highly qualified job or work for the civil service; and give Arabic proper recognition in secondary and higher education by making it an optional language and by reconsidering the creation of an Arabic language department at Ouagadougou University. All this would help Arabic-speaking graduates enter the labour market, increase their self-esteem and reduce negative perceptions of Arab education. Technical and financial partners could contribute to this process.

**B. *Ensuring Equitable Profile and Representation for Religions in Public Life***

One of the main grievances of Muslim leaders concerns the representation of religious authorities when the government requests their contribution. Although Catholics and Protestants interviewed by Crisis Group maintained that the proportion of the population each religious community represents should not be the key factor in allocating representatives, most of them recognised that it would not be a problem to add a Muslim representative.<sup>116</sup> This would correct the imbalance and show Muslims that their interests are being taken into account, while avoiding the pitfall of creating new frustrations.

Other more symbolic grievances could easily be dealt with. For example, airtime on RTB could be allocated in a more equitable way. Muslim, Catholic and Protestant holidays could receive equitable public exposure. Greater efforts by the government to ensure Islam has equal status to Christianity would reduce frustrations felt by some Muslim constituencies.

**C. *Regulating Religious Discourse and Promoting Coexistence***

The government should not take religious coexistence for granted and do more to regulate religious discourse. Burkina, like other countries, is undergoing constant change. As an interviewee summarised, “Burkina is not an island” and it would be naive to believe that the country will be able to remain an exception indefinitely.<sup>117</sup>

Unlike other countries that have a dedicated ministry, Burkina’s religious affairs are administered by the Customary Affairs and Religion Section of the Department of Public Freedoms and Political Affairs in the local government, decentralisation and internal security ministry (MATDSI). The government should allocate more financial resources to this department to allow its staff to work effectively. If the resources are available, the government should also start mapping places of worship and the people in charge of them. This is a necessary precondition for better regulation of religious discourse. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, imams are listed on a register that contains their name, contact details and place of worship and they carry an electronic card comparable to an identity card.<sup>118</sup> Such mapping, covering leaders and places of worship of all faiths, could be a good example for Burkina to follow.

The revival of ONAFAR, decided on at the council of ministers after the January 2016 terrorist attacks, should be implemented. This institution should be allocated an operational budget, administrative staff and office equipment. It should then pre-

<sup>116</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Catholic representative, minister, Ouagadougou; minister, Fada N’Gourma, April 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Crisis Group interview, Catholic representative, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Crisis Group interview, imam, Bouaké, August 2015.

pare a communications strategy to publicise its mission and activities. The president of one of the main Protestant youth associations had never heard of the ONAFAR, which underlines how little impact it has.<sup>119</sup> Opening local offices would also help increase its visibility. The existence of an institution dedicated to monitoring religious discourse and interfaith relations would increase the government's capacity to anticipate risks and limit the spread of dangerous ideas. International partners could contribute to these efforts.

A bill on religious freedoms, which is currently being drafted, aims to fill the legal vacuum regarding how to implement secularism, guarantees of religious freedoms and church-state relations. It contains interesting provisions, especially regulations on the construction of places of worship and the creation of faith associations, and the definition and application of secularism.<sup>120</sup> The government should include it on its agenda for debate at the council of ministers and then present it to parliament. Once approved, the authorities should make a concerted effort to publicise it.

Religious associations should work toward reducing the divisions between them and promoting greater participation by women and young people. Inter-generational divides risk pushing young people toward more radical and violent ways of expressing themselves than their elders. Women could also make a positive contribution to coexistence and their voices must be heard.

Finally, everybody must play their part in promoting religious tolerance and publicise examples of peaceful coexistence, particularly in the media. Many initiatives exist but they only have limited support and visibility. The government should become more involved and international partners could offer to contribute. A religious leader in Ouahigouya explained, for example, that a weekly radio broadcast to promote peaceful coexistence brings together a priest and an imam but that the latter sometimes finds it hard to cover the cost of the fuel to the radio station. What seem to be small contributions could have a significant impact. Special attention should be paid to initiatives taken by the youth or designed for their benefit and to border zones, especially the Sahel and the northern and western parts of the country.

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<sup>119</sup> Crisis Group interview, Protestant representative, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

<sup>120</sup> "Exposé des motifs de l'avant-projet de loi sur les libertés religieuses au Burkina Faso", MATDSI document, undated, copy provided to Crisis Group. Crisis Group interview, civil servant, Ouagadougou, April 2016.

## **VI. Conclusion**

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Burkina Faso's model of religious coexistence, which draws on a history of civil peace, diversity and tradition, remains robust. Any visitor to Burkina Faso can see that coexistence is a reality and tolerance prevails. Those who highlight the dangers of opening a discussion about these questions and politicising religion have good reasons to do so. Addressing these issues carries risks.

But tensions are beginning to appear and to erode the model of tolerance. This is all the more worrying given the regional and international context and the fact that the government does not seem to be aware that imported ideologies could draw on local frustration. A minority of individuals is enough to cause trouble. In their quest to build a new Burkina after Blaise Compaoré's 27-year rule, the authorities must acknowledge the difficulties related to interfaith relations and relations between the government and religious communities. At the same time, it must recognise that addressing these issues is a delicate and risky endeavour. Action is needed now to find a new balance and promote lasting religious coexistence.

**Dakar/Brussels, 6 September 2016**



Appendix A: Map of Burkina Faso



International Crisis Group/KO/June 2015. Based on UN map no. 4230 (Nov. 2004).

## Appendix B: Acronyms and Main Religious Associations

**AEEMB** – Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans au Burkina, Burkina Association of Muslim Pupils and Students. Founded in 1985 and led by Ali Sawadogo.

**Ahmadiyya** – Muslim association officially recognised in Burkina in 1986. Founded in India at the end of the nineteenth century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, considered by his followers to be a prophet. All other Muslims believe Ahmadiyya is a heretical current.

**CERFI** – Cercle d'études, de recherches et de formation islamique, Centre for Islamic Study, Research and Training, founded in Burkina in 1989 by Francophone Muslim intellectuals and led by El Hadj Souleymane Koné.

**CIE** – Centre international d'évangélisation, International Evangelisation Centre. Founded in 1987 and led by the charismatic minister, Mamadou Philippe Karambiri.

**CITB** – Communauté islamique de la Tijanyyya, Islamic Community of the Tijanyyya. Its stronghold is in Ramatoulaya, near Ouahigouya (Yatenga province, northern region). Organisation belonging to the Tijanyyya brotherhood. Founded in 1979 by Cheikh Sidi Mohamed Maïga and led by his son, Cheikh Aboubacar Maïga II. The Tijanyyya was introduced to Burkina Faso in the 1920s by Cheikh Aboubacar Maïga I.

**CMBF** – Communauté musulmane du Burkina Faso, Muslim Community of Burkina Faso (formerly Communauté musulmane de Haute-Volta, CMHV, Muslim Community of Upper Volta). Founded in 1962 to unite the country's Muslims. Led by El Hadj Abdoul Rasmane Sana.

**CMDIR** – Comités mixtes de dialogue inter-religieux, Joint Interfaith Dialogue Committees. Groups the AEEMB, the JEC and the UGBB.

**Episcopal Conference of Burkina-Niger** – Organisation representing the Catholic Church in Burkina, led by Monseigneur Paul Ouédraogo.

**Coordination des associations islamiques de l'Ouest** – Coordination of Islamic Associations of the West. Formed in Bobo-Dioulasso in response to the lack of regional representation in the FAIB, currently led by El Hadj Amadou Sanogo.

**Apostolic Church** – Protestant Church founded in 1965 and a dissidence of the Assemblies of God. Led by the minister Vincent Ilboudo.

**Eglise biblique de la vie profonde** – Deeper Life Bible Church. Protestant Church present in Burkina.

**FAIB** – Fédération des associations islamiques du Burkina, Burkina Federation of Islamic Associations. Founded in 2005 to unite the different

currents of Islam in Burkina. The four founding organisations were the CITB, the CMBF, Ittihad Islami and the Sunni Movement. The CERFI and the AEEMB are influential members.

**FEME** – Fédération des missions et églises évangéliques, Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions. Groups fourteen Protestant Churches, including the Church of the Assemblies of God, the main protestant denomination in Burkina. It is led by the minister Samuel Yaméogo.

**Ittihad Islami** – Current founded by Cheikh Boubacar Doukouré in the 1980s. Originally a follower of the Tijanyyya but with a vocation to overcome the divisions between Muslims.

**JAD** – Jeunesse des Assemblées de Dieu, Youth of the Assemblies of God. The general secretary is the minister Aimé Ouyi.

**JEC** – Jeunesse étudiante catholique, Catholic Student Youth. The general secretary is Vincent Kogo.

**MATDSI** – Ministère de l'Administration territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Sécurité intérieure, Ministry for Local Government, Decentralisation and Internal Security. The Customary Affairs and Religion Section of the ministry's Department of Public Freedoms and Political Affairs is responsible for religions.

**Sunni Movement** – Association of Wahhabi inspiration officially recognised in Burkina in 1973. Led by El Hadj Adama Nikiéma.

**ONAFAR** – Observatoire national des faits religieux, National Observatory on Religious Affairs, attached to the MATDSI and formed in January 2015 to regulate religious discourse and prevent extremism. The director is the imam Ismaël Tiendrébéogo.

**Qadiriyya** – Muslim brotherhood present in Burkina Faso.

**Tabligh or Dawa** – Fundamentalist non-violent current composed of preachers who travel round the country to preach Islam.

**UFC** – Union fraternelle des croyants, Fraternal Union of Believers. Founded in 1969 by Catholics and Muslims in Dori (Sahel region) to fight famine and promote religious tolerance. François Ramdé is the executive secretary.

**UGBB** – Union des groupes bibliques du Burkina, Burkina Union of Biblical Groups. Main association of protestant pupils and students. The general secretary is Dieudonné Tindano.

**URCB** – Union des religieux et coutumiers du Burkina, Union of the Religious and Customary of Burkina. Founded in 2007 by religious and customary chiefs to fight AIDS.