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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

BENIN

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RDS-IND

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research, Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 10 November 2006.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Benin is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

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It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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2. Background information on Benin

Full country name: The Republic of Benin (formerly known as Dahomey)

Area: Total area 116,622 sq. km

Population: 7.8 million (2005 est)

Capital city: Porto-Novo

Economic capital city: Cotonou

People: 42 different native ethnic groups

Languages: French (official), Fon and Yoruba in the south; and at least ten other important languages, mainly in the north

Religion(s): Christianity 30%, indigenous African 50%, Muslim 20%

Major political parties: Union pour le Bénin du Futur, Renaissance du Bénin, Parti du Renouveau démocratique, Mouvement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, Force clé, and at least 30 other minor parties

Government: Republic under multi-party democratic rule

Head of state: President

(USSD Background Note on Benin dated September 2006) [1a]

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GEOGRAPHY

Benin is a small African country located in the west of the continent, and is bordered by Togo to the west, by Burkina Faso and Niger to the north, Nigeria to the east, and the Bight of Benin to the south. The climate is hot and humid. Annual rainfall in the coastal area averages 36 cm. Benin has two rainy seasons and two dry seasons. (USSD Background Note on Benin dated September 2006) [1a]

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RECENT HISTORY

Europeans began arriving in the area now known as Benin in the 18th century. The Portuguese, the French, and the Dutch established trading posts along the coast and traded weapons in exchange for slaves. In the 19th century, the French established French Protectorates in the main cities and ports and, in 1900, the area eventually became a French colony ruled by a French Governor. Full independence from France was gained on 1 August 1960. (USSD Background Note on Benin dated September 2006) [1a]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

A succession of military coups brought about many changes of government between 1960 and 1972. The last coup brought to power Mathieu Kérékou as head of the Revolutionary Party of the People of Benin. His regime lasted until the 1990s. (USSD Background Note on Benin dated September 2006) [1a]. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Benin Country Profile, dated October 2006, states that growing popular discontent led Kérékou to allow a National Conference to take place in 1989. This led to a new constitution being set up, which provided for multi-party politics, an elected National Assembly, and a qualified presidency. Benin was, in fact, the first African country to successfully effect the transition from dictatorship to a pluralistic political system. The first Presidential and legislative elections held under the new constitution took place in 1991. In the second round of the elections, Nicéphore Soglo beat his nearest rival, Mathieu Kérékou. In March 1996, Kérékou won the Presidential Election and was re-elected again in the 2001 Presidential Election. In 2005, Kérékou announced that he would not attempt to change the constitution in order to stand for a further presidential term of office. In the March 2006 Presidential Elections, Yayi Boni won and still is the current President of Benin. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on Benin dated October 2006) [2]

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ECONOMY

GDP (2005 estimate): US\$8.6 billion

Real GDP growth rate (2005): 3.9%

GDP per capita (2005): US\$1,100

Inflation rate (2005): 3.2%

Main exports: Cotton, palm oil, cocoa

Subsistence agricultural crops: maize, yams, cassava, millet, sorghum, beans and rice

Major trading partners: Nigeria, France, China, Italy, Brazil, Libya, Indonesia, UK, Ivory Coast

(USSD Background Note on Benin dated September 2006) [1a]

The USSD Background Note on Benin, dated September 2006, states that:

“Benin’s economy is chiefly based on agriculture. Cotton accounts for 40% of GDP and roughly 80% of official export receipts. There also is production of textiles, palm products, and cocoa. Corn, beans, rice, peanuts, cashews, pineapples, cassava, yams, and other various tubers are grown for local subsistence. Benin began producing a modest quantity of offshore oil in October 1982. Production ceased in recent years but exploration of new sites is ongoing.”

“...Since the transition to a democratic government in 1990, Benin has undergone a remarkable economic recovery. A large injection of external investment from both private and public sources has alleviated the economic difficulties of the early 1990s caused by global recession and persistently low commodity prices (although the latter continues to affect the economy). The manufacturing sector is confined to some light industry, which is mainly involved in processing primary products and the production of consumer goods.”

“...Despite its growth, the economy of Benin still remains underdeveloped and dependent on subsistence agriculture, cotton production, and regional trade. Inflation has subsided over the past several years. Growth in real output averaged a sound 5% from 1996 to 2003, but a rapid population rise offset much of this growth on a per capita basis. Real economic growth for 2004 was estimated at 5%. Commercial and transport activities, which make up a large part of GDP, are vulnerable to developments in Nigeria, including fuel shortages.” [1a]

The World Bank has had a huge input in Benin’s economy as the country has been one of the most successful recipients of the Bank’s conditional aid under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which provides the basis for World Bank and IMF assistance as well as debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. (World Bank website information on Benin) [17a]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

As regards the human rights situation in Benin in 2005, the USSD 2005 Human Rights Report states:

“The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, problems in several areas were exacerbated by poverty and official corruption. The following human rights problems were reported:

- police use of excessive force
- vigilantism and mob justice
- harsh prison conditions
- arbitrary arrest and detention
- prolonged pretrial detention
- judicial corruption
- forcible dispersion of demonstrations
- violence and societal discrimination against women
- female genital mutilation.
- trafficking and abuse of children, including infanticide
- child labor, including forced and compulsory child labor.”

[1b] Introduction

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3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1a]	United States Department of State Background Note on Benin (September 2006 version) www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6761.htm
	[2]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on Benin (13 October 2006 version) www.fco.gov.uk
	[7]	Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com
	[16]	CIA World Fact Book - Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.html
MAP	[6]	beninensis.net www.beninensis.net/benin_cartes.htm
HISTORY	[1a]	United States Department of State Background Note on Benin (September 2006 version) www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6761.htm
	[2]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on Benin (last updated on 13 October 2006) www.fco.gov.uk
	[5b]	BBC Timeline on Benin (26 October 2006 version) www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/3638535.stm
	[7]	Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com
POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
	[5a]	BBC Country Profile on Benin (26 October 2006 version) www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1064527.stm
	[7]	Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com
	[16]	CIA World Fact Book - Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.html

HUMAN RIGHTS - GENERAL:	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES:		
(IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)		
ARREST AND DETENTION	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
CHILDREN	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[7]	Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com
	[18]	US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/tda2004/bennin.htm
CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY	[10]	Citizenship laws of the world (accessed 10 November 2006) www.multiplecitizenship.com/wscl/ws_BENIN.html
CORRUPTION	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
	[7]	Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com
	[17b]	World Bank www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pdf/durban_pdfs/durban-benin.pdf
	[19]	uk.oneworld.net uk.oneworld.net/guides/benin/development#Corruption
	[20]	Business Anti-Corruption Portal www.business-anti-corruption.com/normal.asp?pageid=134
	[21]	Transparency International www.transparency.org/content/download/4440/26729/file/20_West_Africa_(Alabi).pdf
DEATH PENALTY	[3]	Amnesty International report on the death penalty - List of Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries (September 2006 version) www.amnesty.org

ETHNIC GROUPS	[1a]	United States Department of State Background Note on Benin (September 2006 version) www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6761.htm
	[16]	CIA World Fact Book - Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.html
DISABILITY	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
FOREIGN REFUGEES	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
FREEDOM OF RELIGION	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[1c]	United States Department of State, 2006 Report on International Religious Freedom on Benin, 15 September 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71286.htm
FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm

JUDICIARY	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[4]</p> <p>[7]</p> <p>[16]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm</p> <p>Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org</p> <p>Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book - Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.html</p>
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS	<p>[9]</p> <p>[15]</p>	<p>The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), 1999 World Legal Survey: Benin section www.ilga.info/Information/Legal-survey/africa/benin.htm</p> <p>Behind the Mask, Benin section www.mask.org.za/index.php?page=benin</p>
MEDICAL ISSUES	<p>[8a]</p> <p>[8b]</p> <p>[14]</p> <p>[16]</p> <p>[22]</p>	<p>World Health Organisation (WHO) Country Profile on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.who.int/countries/ben/en</p> <p>World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health Atlas 2005, Benin Country Profile (accessed 9 November 2006) www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/country_profiles_Africa.pdf</p> <p>United Nations AIDS (Joint UN Programme on AIDS) www.unaids.org/en</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book – Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.htm</p> <p>endfistula.org www.endfistula.org/docs/na_benin.pdf</p>
MILITARY SERVICE	<p>[13]</p> <p>[16]</p>	<p>War Resisters' International (WRI), Refusing to Bear Arms, May 1998 – Benin section www.wri-irg.org/co/rtba/benin.htm</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book - Benin section www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/bn.html</p>
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[7]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm</p> <p>Europa World Online section on Benin (accessed on 9 November 2006) www.europaworld.com</p>

PRISON CONDITIONS	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[23]	justiceinitiative.org www.justiceinitiative.org/dbresource2?res_id=102011
	[24]	United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54415&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=BENIN
SECURITY FORCES	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
TRAFFICKING	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[1d]	United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons 2006 Report, 5 June 2006 www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65988.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on Benin www.freedomhouse.org
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	[25]	Anti-slavery International www.antislavery.org/archive/other/trafficking-benin-synopsis.htm
	[26]	Human Rights Internet www.hri.ca/fortherecord1997/documentation/tbodies/crc-c-3-add52.htm
	[27]	US embassy, Cotonou www.cotonou.usembassy.gov/2005_tipeng.html
	[28]	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/insight7.pdf
TERRORISM	[12]	Terrorism Research Centre (based in the USA) www.terrorism.com
WOMEN	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2005 Report on Human Rights Practices - Benin, 8 March 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61554.htm
	[29]	Inter-Parliamentary Union www.ipu.org/wmn-e/fqm-prov-b.htm
	[30]	Afrol News www.afrol.com/html/Categories/Women/FGM/fgm_map.htm
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 - c International Religious Freedom 2005 Report on Benin, 15 September 2006
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- 2 **Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom**
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- 4 **Freedom House**
Benin section of the 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report
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- 5 **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** www.bbc.co.uk/
 - a Country Profile: Benin, 26 October 2006
www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1064527.stm
Date accessed 8 November 2006
 - b Timeline: Benin, 26 October 2006
www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/3638535.stm
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- 6 **Beninensis.net**
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- 7 **Europa World Online**
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 - b 2005 Mental Health Atlas
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- 9 **International Lesbian and Gay Association 1999 World Legal Survey**
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- 10 **Citizenship laws of the world**
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- 12 **Terrorism Research Centre**
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- 14 **United Nations AIDS (UNAIDS)**
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- 23 **Justiceinitiative.org**
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- 25 **Anti-slavery International**
www.antislavery.org/archive/other/trafficking-benin-synopsis.htm
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www.hri.ca/fortherecord1997/documentation/tbodies/crc-c-3-add52.htm
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- 27 **United States Embassy, (Cotonou, Benin)**
www.cotonou.usembassy.gov/2005_tipeng.html
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- 28 **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**
www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/insight7.pdf
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- 29 **Inter-Parliamentary Union**
www.ipu.org/wmn-e/fgm-prov-b.htm
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- 30 **Afrol News**
www.afrol.com/html/Categories/Women/FGM/fgm_map.htm
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- 31 **Asylumlaw.org**
www.asylumlaw.org/docs/benin/usdos01_fgm_Benin.pdf
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