

FIJI

Prior to its abrogation in April 2009, the constitution and other laws and policies protected religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced those protections. Laws and policies generally continued to protect religious freedom for most groups. However, the government placed restrictions on annual meetings of the Methodist Church.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice; however, the government's level of respect for religious freedom declined during the reporting period. For the second year in a row, the government announced a ban on the annual conference of the Methodist Church and the quarterly meetings of its 52 divisions, and prosecuted under criminal law 27 members of the church standing committee for meeting and resolving to proceed with the 2009 conference despite the announced ban. The harassment of Methodists appeared to stem from the military's disapproval of links between some church leaders and political parties critical of the military. In December 2010, the government announced that the ban on the annual conference of the church was lifted and the quarterly divisional meetings could resume. However the government said the annual meeting must happen only on one day, rather than the usual four days as in previous years, potentially limiting membership fundraising drives.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago of more than 300 islands with an area of 7,050 square miles and a population of 827,000. Most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. Estimates of religious affiliation are as follows: 52 percent of the population is Christian, 30 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which claims approximately 218,000 members, nearly one quarter of the population. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also have significant followings. The Methodist Church is supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remains influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural

areas. There are also a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religious affiliation runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute 57 percent of the population, are Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who account for 37 percent, are Hindu, while 20 percent of the Indo-Fijians are Muslim and 6 percent of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese, Europeans, Rotumans, and other Pacific Islanders. Approximately 60 percent of the small Chinese community is Christian. The very small European community is predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintained a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations are nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations have missionaries in the country. The Adventist, Anglican, Catholic, Hindu, Methodist, Mormon, Muslim, and other denominations operate numerous schools, including colleges that are not subsidized by the government.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

Prior to its abrogation in April 2009, the constitution and other laws and policies protected religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced those protections. Since then, laws and policies generally continued to protect religious freedom for most groups, but the government's level of respect for religious freedom declined.

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. There is no state religion. Religious groups are required to register with the government under the Religious Bodies Registration Act. The government did not restrict foreign clergy or domestic or foreign missionary activity.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter, Christmas, Diwali, and the Birth of the Prophet Mohammed.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice; however, the role of religion continued to be a sensitive political issue.

On January 12, 2010, the government banned the Methodist Church's annual conference until 2014. The government accused church ministers of being on the payroll of the ousted Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua government (SDL) and spying on the military before the 2006 coup. Prime Minister Commodore Bainimarama criticized the church's links to the SDL. In February the government banned the quarterly meetings of the church's 52 divisions. In December 2010 the government lifted the ban on meetings, with the condition that the annual meeting must be conducted in one day, rather than over four days as in previous years.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. As defined by local authorities, three cases of insult to a religion, three of disturbing religious assemblies, and 23 of sacrilege were reported in 2010. Police surmised that many incidents had more to do with theft than with religious intolerance.

There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream that sought to establish congregations in villages and on outer islands.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government and non-governmental organizations dedicated to interfaith and civic dialogue as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.