

KIRIBATI

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

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

Although the U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji was accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy in Fiji visited the country and discussed religious freedom issues with the government and nongovernmental organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The 2005 census showed that the major religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church, 55 percent; Kiribati Protestant Church, 36 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 3 percent; the Baha'i Faith, 2 percent; and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2 percent. The growing Mormon group claims to have higher numbers of adherents, totaling 15,364 members or 15 percent of the estimated population. Persons with no religious affiliation account for less than 1 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic Church are concentrated in the northern islands, while Protestants are the majority in the southern islands.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

There is no state religion. The government does not favor a particular religious group.

Although the law requires that a religious organization must be able to claim a certain percentage of the population as members before it may be registered, there are no consequences for not registering. The Mormon Church, which is not registered, is able to perform marriages, own property, and operate schools and churches with no interference from the government.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter, Christmas, and National Gospel Day.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the year.

Most governmental meetings and events began and ended with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church official.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

There were occasional problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream that desired to proselytize in some villages and on outer islands. To avoid conflict, some nonmainstream groups did not attempt to proselytize in villages where they felt unwelcome.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji was also accredited to the government.

Representatives of the embassy in Fiji visited the country and discussed religious freedom issues with the government and nongovernmental organizations.