

NAURU

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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief, affiliation, or practice; however, some elements of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voiced discomfort with religious groups viewed as unorthodox, in particular The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Although the U.S. government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy in Fiji discussed religious freedom in the context of discussions about human rights with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

Christianity is the primary religion. According to the 2002 census, approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant and the remaining one-third is Catholic. Ethnic Chinese residents, estimated to constitute 5 percent of the population, are Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons had small numbers of followers in the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Under the constitution the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association may be restricted by any law "which is reasonably required...in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health."

There is no state religion.

Under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, religious groups must register with the government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building churches, holding religious services, and otherwise practicing their religion. The Catholic Church, the Nauru Congregational Church (which includes the Kiribati Protestant Church), the Assemblies of God, and the Nauru Independent Church are officially registered to operate.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter and Christmas.

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. The legal counsel for the Mormons asserted that while the law permits the government to recognize a religious denomination, it requires such recognition only if a denomination's ministers wish to solemnize marriages. This was confirmed by the Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives reported that although they have not registered, they have not had any problems with the government granting visas to their missionaries. The government has never interfered with their religious services.

The government had in the past cited the restrictive provision in the constitution as a basis for preventing foreign churches from proselytizing native-born citizens but did not do so during the year.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Missionaries representing several Christian groups are active and operate freely. Economic problems resulting from sharply declining income from the phosphate mining industry have led to social strains, including between the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities and religious groups perceived as foreign, in particular Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses; however, these latter groups stated that their missionaries have not faced any social hostility.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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