

PALAU

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 affiliation, belief, or practice.

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contacts with the various religious communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 65 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church, 2,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 1,000; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 300; and Jehovah's Witnesses, 90. Modekngai, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 1,800 adherents. There is a foreign community of more than 6,000; the majority is Filipino Catholic, and there are small groups of Chinese Uighur and Bangladeshi Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Although the government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, prayers are generally offered at government-sponsored ceremonies and events.

The government does not promote or restrain religious activities. The government requires religious groups to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the government did not deny registration to any group during the year. As nonprofit organizations, churches and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes.

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Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the government denied permits to any persons during the year.

The government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Representatives of any religious group may request government financial support for religious schools. The government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the year. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stems from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshis, following complaints from employers that workers' non-Christian religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employee families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there were no impediments to their practice of religion.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and maintained regular contacts with the various religious communities.