

# PAPUA NEW GUINEA

## 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.

The ambassador and embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and met regularly with local religious leaders and with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations.

## Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2000 census (the most recent available), 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. Churches with the most members are Roman Catholic, 27 percent; Evangelical Lutheran, 20 percent; United Church, 12 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent; Pentecostal, 9 percent; Evangelical Alliance, 5 percent; Anglican, 3 percent; and Baptist, 3 percent. Other Christian groups, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Salvation Army constitute 9 percent. Baha'is make up less than 1 percent of the population and the final 3 percent hold indigenous or other beliefs. Many citizens integrate Christian faith with some indigenous beliefs and practices.

Nontraditional Christian and non-Christian religious groups have become increasingly active in recent years. Muslim and Confucian organizations have a growing presence. The Muslim community has about 3,000 members with a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby and 12 Islamic centers across the country. Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups have found converts within congregations of the more established churches.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution's provisions for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion have consistently been interpreted to mean that any religion may be practiced or propagated as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The predominance of Christianity is recognized in the preamble of the constitution, which refers to "our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours." However, there is no state religion.

The Department of Community Development, Religion, and Family Affairs has a nominal policy-making role that has largely been confined to reiterating the government's respect for church autonomy.

In general, the government does not subsidize the practice of religion. Churches continue to run most schools and many health services, and the government provides support for these institutions. Upon independence, the government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operation on a per pupil or per patient basis. The government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. The education and health infrastructures continue to rely heavily on church-run institutions. Some schools and clinics closed periodically because they did not receive promised government support; these problems were due in part to the government's endemic financial management problems.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religions, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities. The Roman Catholic Church is the only traditional church that relies to a large extent on foreign clergy.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside one hour per week for religious instruction in the public schools. Representatives of Christian churches teach the lessons, and the students attend the class operated by the church of their parents' choice. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused. Members of non-Christian religious groups are not numerous, and they use family and group gatherings before and after school for religious lessons. Christian groups such as Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons also teach religious lessons in schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

## **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.

## **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.

In recent years, as new missionary movements proliferated, representatives and individuals of some established churches have questioned publicly, in denominational meetings and newspaper articles, whether such activity was desirable. However, such questioning has not led to any action.

The Council of Churches made the only known effort at interfaith dialogue. The council members included the Anglican, Gutnius Lutheran, Baptist Union, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, United churches, and the Salvation Army. In addition, 16 parachurch organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participated in its activities. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among Christian groups on social welfare projects. The Council of Churches does not include Seventh-day Adventists or Pentecostals.

## **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The ambassador and embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and met regularly with local religious leaders and with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations.