

SOLOMON ISLANDS

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 U.S. government, through the embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and its consular agency office in the country, discussed religious freedom with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 90 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican Church of Melanesia, 33 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; United Methodist, 10 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent. These five groups make up the Solomon Islands Christian Association, an ecumenical nongovernmental organization that plays a leading role in the civic life of the country. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, practices indigenous animistic religions. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Unification Church, and indigenous churches that have broken away from the major Christian denominations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has a nominal policy-making role concerning religion. It characterizes its role as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression on the one

hand and maintaining public order on the other. All religious institutions are required to register with the government, but there were no reports registration was denied to any group.

In general the government does not subsidize religious groups. However, several schools and health services were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the United Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After attaining independence, the government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed instead to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the five Christian churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The government subsidizes church schools only if they align their curricula with governmental criteria. Non-Christian religious instruction may be taught in the schools for practitioners of other religions, if they request it.

Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible. The constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit 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. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, were organized through the Solomon Islands Christian Association. In general the society is tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government, through the embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and its consular agency office in the country, discussed religious freedom with the government.