

TAIWAN

Executive Summary

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

There was one report of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) regularly met with representatives of faith-based social service organizations as part of its efforts to promote human rights and religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2006 Government Information Office Yearbook, the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) estimated that 35 percent of the population considers itself to be Buddhist and 33 percent Taoist. While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents are categorized as either Buddhist or Taoist, many adherents consider themselves to be both Buddhist and Taoist.

In addition to organized religions, many persons also practice traditional Chinese folk religions, which include some aspects of shamanism, ancestor worship, and animism. Researchers and academics estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions, and Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong is a self-described spiritual discipline that combines qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of founder Li Hongzhi. Falun Gong is registered as a civic rather than a religious organization. According to an academic source, Falun Gong membership exceeds one million and continues to grow.

Traditional Chinese religions with adherents constituting less than 5 percent of the population include the following: I Kuan Tao, Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor

Religion), Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Li-ism, Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion), Tian Li Chiao (Tenrikyo), Universe Maitreya Emperor Religion, Hai Tze Tao, Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion), Da Yi Chiao (Great Changes Religion), Pre-cosmic Salvationism, and Huang Chung Chiao (Yellow Middle Religion).

Small percentages of the population are Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Sunni Muslim. The Church of Scientology, the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mahikari Religion, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Unification Church are registered. Unregistered denominations include Presbyterians, the True Jesus Church, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, and Episcopalians. The majority of the indigenous population of 507,000 aborigines is Protestant or Catholic. There is also a small number of adherents of Judaism, although they are predominately expatriates.

Section II. Status of Official Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Registration for religious organizations is voluntary. Registered religious organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to submit annual reports on their financial operations. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for registered religious organizations.

At the end of the year, 27 religious organizations were registered with the MOI's Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to do so and operate as the personal property of their leaders. There were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religious groups during the year.

Religious organizations are permitted to operate private schools. Compulsory religious instruction is not permitted in any Ministry of Education (MOE)-accredited public or private elementary, middle, or high school. High schools accredited by the MOE, while not allowed to require religious instruction, may provide elective courses in religious studies, provided such courses do not promote

certain religious beliefs over others. Religious organizations have objected that a church-sponsored religious school should be allowed to require religious courses as part of the school's curriculum. These religious organizations believe that not being allowed to teach, for example, Catholic religion exclusively at a Catholic school is an infringement on the school's religious freedom.

Universities and research institutions may have religious studies departments. There are many private theological institutes. The MOE has accredited the Dharma Drum Mountain Community University established by the late Buddhist Master Sheng Yen, the School of Theology of Chang Jung Christian University, the College of Buddhism of Huafan University, the College of Buddhist Studies of Fo Guang University, and the Chief Sun College of Buddhist Studies. According to the MOE, there are nine additional university-level religion departments and/or theological institutes under review for accreditation.

According to the Ministry of Justice, colleges and universities now have full authority to design their own curriculums. If students with non-religion majors are required to take religion courses and file a complaint about the policy to the MOE, the MOE can then require the school to change its policy. If the MOE finds that the school's teaching of religion-related courses is justified, the school can proceed to teach those courses.

No religious holidays are treated as national holidays.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Taiwan law does not guarantee a day off for domestic workers and caregivers. An estimated 80,000 foreign workers in Taiwan are Catholic and, in the absence of a guaranteed day off, were not able to fulfill their religious duties. The Council of Labor Relations is working to address this issue.

Religious organizations have complained that only priests and nuns are able to obtain missionary visas under Taiwan law. Taiwan's immigration law does not have a formal provision for missionary visas for individuals who do not have the rank of priest or nun.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was one report of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In October, the Taipei City authorities fined a private Catholic school NT\$600,000 (\$19,820) for religious discrimination. The school was accused of firing two female American teachers who were Mormons. This was the first case in Taiwan in which an employer was fined for religious discrimination.

The school had determined the two Mormon teachers were actively working against Catholic beliefs and that one teacher was offering extra credit to students who attended Mormon religious services. Local representatives of the Catholic Church stated that a religious school should be permitted to dismiss a teacher if the teacher has a conflict with the school's religion.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

AIT representatives regularly met with representatives of faith-based social service organizations as part of the AIT's efforts to enhance and promote human rights and religious freedom. These organizations are involved extensively in the issues of human trafficking and migrant labor, and promote interfaith religious tolerance.