

TONGA

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.

U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom with the government and nongovernmental organizations. The U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country; the ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is accredited to the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to 2006 census data, the latest available, membership by percentage of population of major religious groups is the following: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 37 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 17 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 16 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, 11 percent. Other Christian denominations, including the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Anglicans, and Jehovah's Witnesses, in total account for approximately 14 percent. Followers of the Baha'i Faith, Muslims, Hindus, observers of Chinese traditional festivals, and Buddhists together constitute approximately 4 percent of the population; the remaining 1 percent declined to state their religious affiliation, if any.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the government for tax purposes but is not required. All religious groups are permitted

duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

The constitution states that Sunday as the Sabbath day is to be “kept holy” and that no business can be conducted “except according to law.” Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all other businesses, regardless of a business owner’s religion.

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.

The government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of “the character of the listening public,” those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching “within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition.” All religious groups are permitted to host programs on Radio Tonga and TV Tonga, but discussions of the basic tenets of non-Christian religions are not permitted. Notices of activities of all churches were broadcast on both Radio Tonga and TV Tonga as well as on privately owned radio and television stations.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country and operate freely.

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.

A number of religious groups including Mormons, the Free Wesleyan Church, Catholics, Anglicans, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha’is operated schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom during meetings with the government and nongovernmental organizations. The U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country, and the ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is accredited to the government.