

MAURITIUS 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious freedom through public diplomacy programs and engagement with the government and civil society. Embassy representatives frequently attended ceremonies and celebrations of all religions and beliefs.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2011 census, the population is 1,236,000. Approximately 48 percent is Hindu, 26 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 6 percent other Christian, including Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of the Assemblies of God. The remaining 3 percent includes Buddhists, animists, and others. More than 95 percent of Muslims are Sunnis.

On the main island, the population of the city of Port Louis is primarily Muslim and Roman Catholic, while the majority of the rest of the island's population is Hindu. The island of Rodrigues is 90 percent Roman Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent are primarily Catholic.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

MAURITIUS

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

A parliamentary decree recognizes religious groups that were present prior to independence, including Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims. These groups receive an annual lump sum payment from the finance ministry based on the number of their adherents as determined by the census. The registrar of associations registers new religious groups, which must have a minimum of seven members. The finance ministry grants these new groups tax-exempt privileges.

The government allows foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restrict their presence or limit proselytizing activities, religious groups must obtain both a residence permit and a work permit for each missionary. The prime minister's office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are unofficial limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. The government grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extensions.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Thaipooam Cavadee, Maha Shivaratree, Ougadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid al-Fitr, Divali, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Some Christians and Muslims alleged that the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service resulted in "interference" in the government promotion system, and prevented them from reaching higher-level positions in the civil service. More generally, non-Hindus often claimed underrepresentation in government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

MAURITIUS

Tensions between Hindus and Muslims continued. On August 8, police arrested a Hindu woman for allegedly posting anti-Muslim comments on a social network site. She was released on bail and the investigation was ongoing at year's end.

The women's wing of the Muslim Youth Federation claimed that some private companies refused to employ Muslim women wearing the hijab.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious freedom through public diplomacy programs, including some that highlighted Islam in the United States, and engaged the government on religious freedom issues, advocating continued respect for diversity. The embassy hosted a post-Ramadan Eid dinner for prominent members of the Muslim community, and regularly attended religious ceremonies and celebrations of other religious groups.

The embassy supported the mission of the Council of Religions, an interfaith group advocating continued respect of religious diversity, by donating books for its interfaith diploma offered at the University of Mauritius.