

MARSHALL ISLANDS 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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. embassy actively promoted religious freedom. Embassy staff consulted with government officials and local religious group leaders regarding religious freedom and attended the opening of the country's first mosque.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is 53,158, according to the 2011 census. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 52 percent of the population; the Assemblies of God, 24 percent; the Roman Catholic Church, 9 percent; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 8 percent. Groups together constituting less than 7 percent include Bukot Non Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), Full Gospel, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Bahais, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Ahmadi Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the free exercise of religion and equal protection under the law, regardless of religious beliefs. There are no legislative restrictions on religious practices. Although there is no official state religion, Christianity is the dominant social and cultural influence. Governmental functions typically begin and end with an ordained minister or other church official delivering a Christian prayer.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences for not registering.

There is no religious education in public schools and no opening or closing prayers during the school day. However, most extracurricular school events begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and regularly met with local religious group leaders and foreign missionaries. The ambassador and embassy representatives discussed the opening of the country's first mosque with government officials, and an embassy representative attended the opening ceremony in September.