

# **SOLOMON 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 some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most members of society were tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

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. Representatives from the embassy met with the chairman of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), which is comprised of the five largest Christian churches in the country.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The 2009 National Census estimates the population to be 515,900. 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; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; and United Methodist, 10 percent. These five groups make up the SICA, 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, adheres to indigenous animistic religions. Groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, Bahais, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), members of the Unification Church, and members of indigenous churches that have broken away from the major Christian denominations.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

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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 maintaining 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 groups must register with the government, which routinely approves such requests.

In general the government does not subsidize religious groups. However, religious groups operate several schools and health services. The government subsidizes schools administered by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the United Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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

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.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice was not prevalent. However, there were societal disputes over religious doctrine within faith communities, particularly in rural areas. Such doctrinal disputes at times resulted in violence between members of competing schools of thought within village-level faith communities. Violence most frequently occurred when control over financial or land assets of the faith community was at stake and was exacerbated by ethnic, tribal, or political divisions within a community.

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The SICA organized joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events. In general members of society were 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. Embassy staff met with the chairman of the SICA and with representatives of minority religious groups to discuss and highlight the importance of religious freedom.