

NAURU 2013 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.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief, affiliation, or practice; however, some elements of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voiced discomfort with religious groups they viewed as unorthodox, in particular, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Although the U.S. government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy in Fiji discussed religious freedom in the context of discussions about human rights with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9,400 (July 2013 estimate). Christianity is the primary religion. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant and the remaining one-third Catholic. Ethnic Chinese residents, estimated to constitute 5 percent of the population, are Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons have small numbers of followers. The Australian government houses about 670 asylum seekers in Nauru of various religious groups from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. Under the constitution, the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association may be restricted by any law "which is reasonably required...in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health."

There is no state religion.

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Under the law religious groups must register with the government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building houses of worship, holding religious services, officiating marriages, and otherwise practicing their religion. The Catholic Church, the Nauru Congregational Church (which includes the Kiribati Protestant Church), the Assemblies of God, and the Nauru Independent Church are officially registered to operate.

Government Practices

The legal counsel for the Mormon Church stated that while the law called for the registration of religious denominations, the government required such recognition only if a denomination's ministers wished to officiate at marriages. The registrar of births, deaths, and marriages confirmed this. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that although they have not registered, they have not had any problems with the government granting visas to their missionaries. Neither the Mormons nor Jehovah's Witnesses attempted to register. There were no reports that the government interfered with religious services or discriminated in registration.

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.

Missionaries representing several Christian groups were active and operated freely.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. government does not maintain an embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy discussed religious freedom with the government in the context of their discussions about human rights.