

NEW ZEALAND 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 reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general officers continued to meet with the government and with representatives of all major religious groups throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and the role of religion in society. The embassy's public diplomacy efforts regularly included interactions with religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 4.4 million (July 2013 estimate). According to 2013 census data, 11.8 percent of the population is Anglican, 12.6 percent Roman Catholic, 8.1 percent Presbyterian, 2.6 percent Methodist, 7.5 percent other Protestant denominations, 5.5 percent Christian with no affiliation specified, 2.3 percent Hindu, 1.5 percent Buddhist, 1.4 percent Maori religion, 1.2 percent Muslim, and 0.2 percent Jewish. More than 90 additional religious groups together constitute less than 1 percent of the population, while 4.4 percent of the respondents to the census question on religion stated they objected to the question. The number of people stating they had no religion increased by 26 percent compared with the 2006 data, from 34 percent of respondents to 42 percent.

According to 2006 census data, of the indigenous Maori, who make up approximately 15 percent of the population, 14 percent are Anglican, 13 percent Catholic, and 11 percent belong to syncretic Maori Christian groups such as Ratana and Ringatu. Thirty-seven percent stated no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. Religious expression is unrestricted as long as religious practices do not breach the peace.

The government does not specifically promote any religion; however, a Christian prayer is recited at the opening of every parliamentary session.

The law provides that teaching within public primary schools “shall be entirely of a secular character.” It permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters, however. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors; however, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of individual school boards. The ministry does not keep data on how many schools permit religious instruction or observances. Religious instruction, if provided at a school, usually takes place after normal school hours.

Citizens may file complaints of unlawful discrimination to the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC). In the event a complaint is not resolved satisfactorily with the assistance of HRC mediation, the complainant may proceed to the Human Rights Review Tribunal. The tribunal has the authority to issue restraining orders, award monetary damages, or declare a breach of the Human Rights Act, which is reported to parliament. Conduct prohibited by the Human Rights Act may be prosecuted under other laws. In addition to the HRC dispute resolution mechanism, a complainant may initiate proceedings in the court system.

The government does not require the licensing or registration of religious groups; however, if a religious group desires to collect money for any charitable purpose, including the advancement of its religion, and wishes to obtain tax benefits, it must register with the Inland Revenue Department as a charitable trust. There is no fee for this registration.

The law does not prevent the registration of political parties based on religion. The country has two registered Christian-associated political parties.

Government Practices

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In February MP and New Zealand First (not a part of the government) party member Richard Posser made remarks in a column for *Investigate Magazine* suggesting Muslims should not be allowed to travel on Western airlines because “most terrorists are Muslim.” Following swift public backlash, Posser quickly apologized and stated he had “caused offense to those people unjustifiably and unnecessarily.”

Some businesses were fined up to NZD 1,000 (\$822) under the country’s labor laws if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas (this legislation applies as well to Australia – New Zealand Army Corps Day, also an official holiday in the country). The government pursued prosecution of two businesses for violating these laws during the year. The government exempted businesses providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

The HRC continued to implement its 2007 Statement on Religious Diversity, which aimed to assure equal treatment of all religious groups under the law, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. The HRC promoted religious tolerance, facilitated a national interfaith network with a monthly electronic newsletter, and maintained a Diversity Action Program, which included respect for religious diversity.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

The HRC received 70 complaints against members of society for unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief or lack of religious belief.

In June two men were sentenced to community service for the desecration with swastikas and anti-Semitic messages of a Jewish cemetery in October 2012. One of the men accepted the court’s option to leave the country and return to the United Kingdom in lieu of serving. The HRC issued a statement condemning the actions. Following the attack, the Holocaust Centre in Wellington called for making the study of the Holocaust a compulsory subject in secondary schools, rather than allowing teachers the option of including a Holocaust unit in the curriculum. The

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education ministry issued a statement stating that schools and teachers ultimately decide what to teach.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general officers continued to meet with the government and with representatives of all major religious groups throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and the role of religion in society. The embassy's public diplomacy efforts regularly included interactions with religious groups. Embassy and consulate general officers attended three iftar dinners and an Eid celebration with close contacts from the Muslim community. The Consul General delivered remarks at the launch of the first Pasifika Presbyterian Pacific Synod and the Ambassador hosted an event for Auckland-based Pasifika church leaders.