

SOLOMON ISLANDS 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for religious freedom, including the freedom to change religions, proselytize, and establish religious schools. This freedom can be made subject to laws “reasonably required” to achieve certain listed public goals.

Members of society were tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities, although there were reports of violence within religious groups.

The U.S. government, through the embassy in Papua New Guinea and its consular agency office in country, discussed religious freedom with the government. Representatives from the embassy met with religious leaders during the year.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 610,000 (July 2014 estimate). 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. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio ethnic 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, members of 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 major Christian denominations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the freedom to practice, change, and proselytize for the individual and community. It also provides for the freedom to establish non-compulsory religious instruction. These provisions can be made subject to laws “reasonably required” to protect the rights of others or for defense or public safety, order, morality, or health. No such laws have been reported. All religious groups must register with the government, which routinely approves such requests.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Religious groups are required to apply in writing to the Registrar of Companies for a certificate of registration. The registrar will issue a certificate when satisfied that the nature, extent, objectives, and circumstances of the applicant are non-commercial. There have been no reports of groups being denied registration.

Government Practices

The government interacted with religious groups through the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs characterized its role as maintaining a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and maintaining public order.

Religious groups operated several schools and health services. The government subsidized most of the 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. There were no reports of discrimination among groups in receiving these subsidies.

The public school curriculum included an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed by the five member churches of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). Parents were able to have their children excused from religious education. Government subsidized church schools were required to align their other curricula with governmental criteria. Non-Christian religious instruction was provided in the schools upon request.

Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible but this was not a compulsory practice.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were societal disputes within faith communities, particularly in rural areas, that sometimes resulted in violence. Violence occurred when control over financial or land assets of the faith community was at stake and was accompanied by ethnic, tribal, or political divisions within a community. When government involvement was necessary, the government typically tried to mediate such disputes.

In general, members of society were tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities. The five largest religious groups make up the SICA, an ecumenical

SOLOMON ISLANDS

nongovernmental organization that plays a leading role in the civic life of the country. SICA organized joint religious activities and encouraged religious representation at national events.

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 country, discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy staff met with representatives of the Bahai community, Church of Melanesia, South Seas Evangelical Church, and Catholic nuns to discuss and highlight the importance of religious freedom.