

# **FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution states no law may be passed respecting the establishment of religion or impairing the free exercise of religion. Assistance may be provided to religiously affiliated schools for nonreligious purposes. There were reports of resistance by local government officials in Kosrae State to a Muslim group, which wanted to provide humanitarian assistance. The local leadership reportedly refused to meet with them, threatened to revoke their nonprofit status, and blocked construction permits for their community home.

An Inter-Denominational Council existed to address social problems and promote official cooperation among religious groups.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and worked with faith-based nongovernmental organizations in its efforts to promote religious tolerance. In addition, the embassy promoted religious tolerance through its public diplomacy efforts.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 105,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to government statistics, approximately 99 percent of the population identify as Christian. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. The United Church of Christ is the main Protestant denomination. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Seventh-day Adventists. Smaller groups include Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, and Ahmadi Muslims.

According to the Federated States of Micronesia Office of Statistics, in Kosrae, 90 percent of the population is Protestant. In Pohnpei the population is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics – more Protestants live on the western side of Pohnpei, while more Catholics live on the eastern side. In Chuuk an estimated 60 percent is Catholic and 40 percent is Protestant. In Yap an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder is Protestant. Religious affiliation often tends to follow clan lines.

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The majority of foreign workers are Filipino Catholics.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

The constitution's Declaration of Rights forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion, although the government may fund nonreligious activities in religiously-affiliated schools.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups. There is no religious education in the public schools, but it is part of the curriculum in private religious schools.

#### **Government Practices**

During the year, some Ahmadi Muslims moved from Majuro to Kosrae State with the expressed purpose of providing humanitarian assistance. However, according to the Ahmadis, they experienced resistance from the local leadership, which threatened to revoke their nonprofit status and blocked their construction permits for their community home. Other religious groups, who have established themselves in Kosrae, such as the Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists, indicated they experienced similar resistance at first; however, they stated the local communities eventually tolerated them.

Government activities and events routinely opened and closed with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic pastor or deacon, and often from one of each group.

The government continued to provide grants to private, church-affiliated schools. The government continued to make no distinction between public and private schools in its grants programs.

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

An Inter-Denominational Council existed to address social problems and promote official cooperation among religious groups.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

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The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and held regular meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and senior cabinet officials. Building on an event the embassy cohosted in 2013, various religious groups worked together to host another interdenominational Christmas event to promote cooperation and understanding. In addition, the embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through its public diplomacy programs, especially in the state of Kosrae where embassy officials regularly met with local religious leaders and government officials on these issues and reported on these meetings via social media.