



Palau

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and a population of 20,000. An estimated 70 percent live in Koror State. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in the country; approximately 65 percent of the population is Catholic. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church, 2,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 1,000; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 300; and Jehovah's Witnesses, 90. Modekngai, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 1,800 adherents. There is a primarily Catholic Filipino expatriate community of 6,800, as well as a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early nineteenth century, foreign missionaries have been active; some have been in the country for many years. The Seventh-day Adventists and the Evangelical Church have missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities. The Government requires religious groups to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the period covered by this report. As nonprofit organizations, churches and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any persons during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Government financial support for religious schools may be requested by representatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday. Although the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, state and national events as well as graduation ceremonies are always opened with prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the authorities during the period covered by this report. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stems from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens, following complaints from employers that workers' non-Christian religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employee families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there were no impediments to their practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

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