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U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Tonga

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TONGA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice.

The Constitution states that the "Sabbath day" (Sunday) "be kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourist industry, the "Sunday ban" is enforced strictly. The King and most nobles are "Free Wesleyan" Methodists, but the Government does not discriminate among religions. For example, all religious groups are permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax free status.

Free Wesleyan Methodists, Roman Catholics, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints each state that between 30 and 40 percent of all citizens are members of their faith. These three religious denominations total at least 90 percent of the population. Members of the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Assembly of God, other Christian denominations, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and the Hindu faith are represented in much smaller numbers.

Western missionaries, particularly members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and other Christian denominations, proselytize freely. There are a number of schools operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and by the Wesleyan Church.

There are no government-sponsored ecumenical activities.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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

Section II. Societal Attitudes

In general there are amicable relations between the religious communities. However, the one, privately-owned television station, to which the Government grants tariff concessions as a public service and which has a mainstream Christian orientation, reportedly takes a strong editorial policy against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Nonetheless, the Church appears to be thriving.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji meet with religious officials and nongovernmental organizations during visits to the country.

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