



Tuvalu

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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

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

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. However, in July 2003, the island council of Nanumanga reportedly banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is composed of 9 island groups with an area of approximately 10 square miles and an estimated population of 9,500. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, has the largest number of followers. There are no official figures on religious membership; however, government officials estimate membership as follows: Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Catholic, 1 percent. There are also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and atheists.

All nine island groups have traditional chiefs who are members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religions or denominations are found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of the relatively large proportion of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

There are a number of active Christian missionary organizations representing some of the same religious faiths practiced in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for separation of church and state. However, in practice government functions at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of Parliament, often include Christian prayers, clergy, or perspectives. By law any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

Missionaries practice without specific restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in July 2003, the island council of Nanumanga reportedly banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church. The head of the Tuvalu Brethren Church filed a complaint against the island council. In April the High Court scheduled the case to be heard in September.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, reportedly there is a degree of social intolerance for non-Church of Tuvalu activities, particularly on some outer islands. According to unconfirmed reports, some residents of Nanumanga were stoned by islanders after leaving the Church of Tuvalu and forming the Tuvalu Brethren Church. Subsequently, the island council reportedly voted to ban the group.

Members of the Church of Tuvalu dominate most aspects of social and political life in the country, in view of the fact that they comprise 90 percent of the population.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji also is accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visit periodically to discuss religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also meet with representatives of the religious communities and nongovernmental organizations that have an interest in religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy actively supports efforts to improve and expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

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