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## Papua New Guinea

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report**

Report

**September 13, 2011**

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The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

The country is an island nation with an area of 287,608 square miles and a population of 6.5 million. According to the 2000 census, 96.4 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. Churches with the most members are Roman Catholic, 27 percent; Evangelical Lutheran, 19.5 percent; United Church, 11.5 percent; Seventh Day Adventist, 10 percent; Pentecostal, 8.6 percent; Evangelical Alliance, 5.2 percent; Anglican, 3.2 percent; and Baptist, 2.5 percent. Other Christian groups, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Salvation Army, constitute 8.9 percent. Bahai make up 0.3 percent of the population and the final 3.3 percent hold indigenous or other beliefs. Many citizens integrate Christian faith with some indigenous beliefs and practices.

Western missionaries introduced Christianity to the country in the 19th century. Colonial governments initially assigned different missions to different geographic regions. Since territory in the country is aligned strongly with language group and ethnicity, this colonial policy led to the identification of certain churches with certain ethnic groups. However, churches of

many denominations are now found throughout the country. The Muslim community has a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby and 10-20 Islamic centers across the country.

Nontraditional Christian and non-Christian religious groups have become increasingly active in recent years. Muslim and Confucian organizations have a growing presence. Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups have found converts within congregations of the more established churches.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) partnered with the Department of Education and local communities in linguistic research, literacy efforts, Bible translation, scripture use, and training. The Department of Education relies on SIL to produce translations of the Bible for government-sponsored religious instruction in schools. As of 2008, SIL had translated the New Testament into 170 of the country's indigenous languages.

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

### Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The constitution's provisions for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion have consistently been interpreted to mean that any religion may be practiced or propagated as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The predominance of Christianity is recognized in the preamble of the constitution, which refers to "our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours." However, there is no state religion.

The Department of Community Development, Women, and Religion has a nominal policy-making role that has largely been confined to reiterating the government's respect for church autonomy.

In general, the government does not subsidize the practice of religion. Churches continue to run most schools and many health services, and the government provides support for these institutions. Upon independence, the government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operation on a per pupil or per patient basis. The government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. The education and health infrastructures continue to rely heavily on church-run institutions. Some schools and clinics closed periodically because they did not receive promised government support; these problems were due in part to the government's endemic financial management problems.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religions, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities. The Roman Catholic Church is the only traditional church that relies to a large extent on foreign clergy.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside one hour per week for religious instruction in the public schools. Representatives of Christian churches teach the lessons, and the students attend the class operated by the church of their parents' choice. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused. Members of non-Christian religious groups are not numerous, and they use family and group gatherings before and after school for religious lessons. Nontraditional Christian groups such as Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons also teach religious lessons in schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

### Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

In recent years, as new missionary movements proliferated, representatives and individuals of some established churches questioned publicly, in denominational meetings and newspaper articles, whether such activity was desirable. The courts and government practice have upheld the constitutional right to freedom of speech, thought, and belief, and no legislation to curb those rights has been adopted.

The Council of Churches made the only known effort at interfaith dialogue. The council members included the Anglican, Gutnius Lutheran, Union Baptist, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, United churches, and the Salvation Army. In addition, 15 parachurch organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participated in its activities. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among Christian groups on social welfare projects. The Council of Churches does not include Seventh Day Adventists or Pentecostals.

### 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. The ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with local religious leaders and with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations and agencies.

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