



Marshall Islands

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 change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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's total area is approximately 67 square miles, and the estimated population in 2002 was 56,630. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 54.8 percent of the population; the Assembly of God, with 25.8 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, with 8.4 percent. Also represented are Bukot Nan Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), with 2.8 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with 2.1 percent; the Seventh-day Adventist Church with 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, with 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, with 0.6 percent. Persons without any religious affiliation account for 1.5 percent of the population, and another 1.4 percent belong to religions or religious groups not named in the 1999 census, but which local religious leaders believe to consist of Muslims, the Salvation Army, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

There are foreign missionaries from the Mormons, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Church, and other groups. Only Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize through door-to-door home visits.

Religious schools are operated by the Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Baptist Church.

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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

There are three Christian-based religious holidays: Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there ramifications for not registering. Missionary groups are allowed to operate freely.

There is no religious education in public schools, and there are no opening or closing prayers during the school day. However, most extracurricular school events begin and end with a nondenominational Christian prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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. Christianity is a dominant social and cultural force. Nonbelievers, who constitute a very small percentage of the residents, do not suffer discrimination. Governmental and social functions typically begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or church official.

Under President Amata Kabua during the early 1990s, the Government mandated the establishment of a National Council of Churches, which representatives of all faiths were invited to join. This group still exists in name, but largely has been inactive.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

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