



Nauru

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government placed some restrictions on the practice of religion by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom are foreign workers employed by the government-owned Nauru Phosphate Corporation (NPC).

There were no indications of general societal discrimination against particular religious denominations; however, economic problems resulting from declining income in the country's important phosphate mining industry have led to some social strains, and there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church (the country's dominant religion) to religions perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 8 square miles, and its population is approximately 10,000. Christianity is the primary religion. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestants, and the remaining one-third are Roman Catholics. The population as a whole is 58 percent Nauruan, 26 percent other Pacific Islanders, 8 percent European, and 8 percent Chinese. Some of the latter group may be Buddhist or Taoist.

Foreign missionaries introduced Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There are a few active Christian missionary organizations, including representatives of the Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic faiths.

Many foreign workers in the country's phosphate industry practice faiths different from those of native-born citizens. Both the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have won converts among such workers, some of whom hold religious services in their NPC-owned housing. Practitioners of "foreign" religions thus are concentrated in the area used by the NPC for workers' housing, known as Location.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances. Under the Constitution, the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association may be contravened by any law that "makes provision which is reasonably required ... in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or

public health." The Government has cited this provision as a basis for preventing foreign churches from proselytizing native-born citizens.

There is no state religion; however, Nauru Protestant Church officials hold influential positions in both the Government and the NPC.

Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons have been informed that, under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government to operate in an official capacity (that is, to build churches, hold religious services in the multinational facility owned by the NPC, and otherwise freely practice their religion). The legal counsel for the Mormons asserted that, while the ordinance in question permits the Government to recognize a religious denomination, it only requires such recognition if a denomination's ministers wish to solemnize marriages. The Church reported that it submitted a registration request in 1999; however, the Government did not respond either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. As of the end of the period covered by this report, officials of Jehovah's Witnesses had not submitted a request for registration.

Christmas and Easter are official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government has prevented officials of both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons from visiting the country in their official capacity and on occasion has prevented them from visiting the country at all. While in the country, these officials have been prevented from openly practicing their religion and have been discouraged from meeting with native-born citizens. As a justification for such restrictions, the Government has cited concern that outside churches might break up families through their proselytizing activity.

On two occasions, the Government detained visiting Mormon officials and confiscated their passports and airline tickets. On the first occasion, in January 2001, an immigration officer informed the church officials as they were attempting to leave the country that they were in violation of the requirement that a citizen sponsor their visit, and that their passports were being taken for photocopying. However, on the second occasion, in May 2002, no such explanation was given; in that instance, church officials had obtained the required sponsorship and visas. Intervention of a senior immigration official was required in both instances before the passports were returned and the officials were allowed to leave the country. In May 2003, visiting Mormon officials were allowed to enter and exit the country, in an unofficial capacity, without incident.

There is a multid denominational religious facility for foreign phosphate workers in the area known as Location; however, Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to use this facility for religious services or meetings. Members of both of these religious groups, who are drawn largely from the Filipino, Tuvaluan, and I-Kiribati communities, also have been threatened with revocation of their work visas if they hold religious services in their NPC-owned living quarters.

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

No evidence exists of general societal discrimination against specific religious denominations; however, economic problems resulting from sharply declining income from the country's phosphate mining industry have led to some social strains, and there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church to religions perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 of Nauru. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Suva, Fiji, have discussed religious freedom issues, including restrictions on religious freedom, with representatives of the Government of Nauru in Suva.

The 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.

Released on September 15, 2004

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