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Solomon Islands

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

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 archipelago with an area of 11,599 square miles and a population of 537,000. Approximately 90 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican Church of Melanesia, 33 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; United Methodist, 10 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent. These five groups comprise the Solomon Islands Christian Association, an ecumenical nongovernmental organization that plays a leading role in the civic life of the country. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, practices indigenous animistic religions. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, Bahais, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Unification Church, and indigenous churches that have broken away from the major Christian denominations. According to reports there are approximately 350 Muslims scattered in small numbers around Honiara, Malaita, and Russell Island.

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 Department of Home Affairs has a nominal policy-making role concerning religion. It characterizes its role as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression on the one hand and maintaining public order on the other. All religious institutions are required to register with the government, but there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the government does not subsidize religious groups. However, several schools and health services were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the United Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon independence the government recognized it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed instead to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the five Christian churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The government subsidizes church schools only if they align their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although non-Christian religious instruction may be taught in the schools for practitioners of those religions, there was no such instruction during the reporting period.

Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible. The constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter 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. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, were organized through the Solomon Islands Christian Association. In previous years decisions made by some villages to mandate Sunday-only worship for Christians marginalized Seventh-day Adventists. However, in general the society is tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government, through the U.S. embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and its consular agency office in the Solomon Islands, discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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