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## Marshall Islands

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom 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 significant 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 70 square miles and a population of 53,200. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 51.5 percent of the population; the Assemblies of God, 24.2 percent; the Roman Catholic Church, 8.4 percent; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 8.3 percent. Also represented are Bukot Non Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), 2.2 percent; Baptist, 1.0 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, 0.6 percent. Nonreligious persons and persons who did not indicate any religious affiliation account for a small percentage of the population. The Jehovah's Witnesses were believed to have a few hundred practitioners, Jews fewer than 20, and Ahmadiyya Muslims fewer than 10.

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

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no official state religion, but Christianity is the dominant social and cultural influence. Governmental and social functions typically begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church official.

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

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences for not registering.

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

Foreign missionaries are present and operate freely. Religious schools are operated by the Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bukot Non Jesus, and the Baptist Church.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom 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 religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

#### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

#### 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 embassy regularly meets with the foreign missionaries present in the country, as well as with the local church leaders on a regular basis.

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