



Solomon Islands

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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 is an archipelago with an area of 10,985 square miles and a population of 566,800. Approximately 92 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican, 35 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; Methodist, 11 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, practice indigenous animistic religions. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, the Baha'i Faith, 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. There are believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community who were free to practice, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent reports, there are approximately 350 Muslims.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western denominations. Some foreign missionaries continue to work in the country. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 45 percent foreign, the clergy of the established churches is nearly entirely indigenous.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The Department of Home Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterized 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, and there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the Government does not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia (Anglican), the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon independence, the Government recognized that 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 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 religions may be taught in the schools, there was no such instruction during the period covered by this report. However, the administrations of the government primary and secondary schools in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita, recently requested multifaith instruction from the Baha'i community.

Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

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 in the country.

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, were organized through the Solomon Islands Christian Association, which is composed of the five traditional churches of the country. Occasionally individual citizens have used denominational meetings or newspaper articles to voice their objections to the activities of nontraditional denominations and suggest that they be curtailed. Decisions made by some villages to mandate only Sunday worship for Christians have marginalized Seventh-day Adventists. The society in general, however, 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 issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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