



Kiribati

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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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 isolated 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 265 square miles and a population of 92,500. Missionaries introduced Christianity into the area in the mid-19th century. According to 2005 government statistics, major religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church, 55 percent; Kiribati Protestant Church, 36 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 3 percent; the Baha'i Faith, 2 percent; and Seventh-day Adventists, 2 percent. Several groups claim to have higher numbers of adherents, but there is no independent confirmation. Persons with no religious affiliation account for less than 1 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic Church are concentrated in the northern islands, while Protestants are the majority in the southern islands.

Section II. Status of 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. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. The Government does not favor a particular religious group.

The Government observes Easter, Christmas, and National Gospel Day as official holidays.

Although the law requires that a religious organization must be able to claim a certain percentage of the population as members before it may be registered, there are no consequences for not registering. The Mormon Church, which is not registered, was able to perform marriages, own property, and operate schools and churches with no interference from the Government.

Missionaries are present and operate freely.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. 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, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who were not allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religious groups generally praised the Government for its role in protecting religious freedom. There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream desiring to establish churches in some villages and on outer islands. In a few cases, traditional leaders, such as chiefs, prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings. Not wanting to invite conflict, some non-mainstream groups did not attempt to proselytize in villages where they felt unwelcome.

Nonreligious persons, who constitute a very small minority, did not suffer discrimination. Most governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church officials.

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.