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## Seychelles

### International Religious Freedom Report 2003

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 171 square miles, and its population is approximately 80,098. According to a July 2003 estimate, 86.6 percent of the population are Roman Catholic and 6.8 percent are Anglican. There are other Christian churches, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Assembly of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, the Assemblies of God, the Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hinduism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith also are practiced. Almost 50 percent of the population is estimated to practice their faith regularly. It is unknown if there are atheists in the country.

A few foreign missionary groups practice in the country, including the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic organization.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches and the Islamic mosques each have their own acts of incorporation. The Baha'i local spiritual assembly was incorporated in 1999. Other churches that are not a corporate body

are registered as associations with the Registrar General and are entitled to tax-free privileges, similar to a charity. All religious organizations must register to be entitled to tax-free privileges. If an organization does not want tax-free privileges, it does not have to register.

The Government tends to remain outside of religious matters, but provides program time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. On Sundays a radio broadcast of a Catholic Mass alternates each week with a broadcast of an Anglican service. The Islam and Hindu faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday, and the Baha'i and Seventh-day Adventists faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Saturday.

In March 2000, the Government announced that government employees of the Baha'i faith could take paid leave on Baha'i holy days. This leave had not been available previously to members of the Baha'i or other faiths. At the time of the announcement, the Government also stated that other religions could submit applications for the recognition of similar unpaid leave days. In May 2000, the Government announced that government employees of all faiths could request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such leave generally is granted. President France Albert Rene's wife is a member of the Baha'i Faith, while the majority of government ministers are Catholic.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

In the past, the Government did not demonstrate favoritism toward one religion over another; however, in early 2000, the Seychelles National Party (SNP), which is the opposition political party and is led by an Anglican minister, claimed that the Government gave a grant of \$164,000 (900,000 Seychelles Rupees) to the Baha'i Faith in 1999, following its incorporation. According to the SNP, this grant has not been offered to other faiths that have been established recently in the country. According to the Government, a portion of the national budget has been allocated in some years to provide assistance to faiths that request it. The grant to the Baha'i Faith in 1999, and again 2000, was for the purpose of building a temple. The Anglican, Hindu, and Roman Catholic faiths have also benefited from government grants. The Roman Catholic Church received a grant of \$200,000 (1 million Seychelles Rupees) in 2000 and in 2001. In 2002 no amount was budgeted for contribution to a religious organization. In 2003, the Government gave a grant of \$400,000 (2 million Seychelles Rupees) to the Anglican Church for the purpose of constructing a new cathedral, and \$400,000 (2 million Seychelles Rupees) to the Roman Catholic Church.

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.

### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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