



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Solomon Islands

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the 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 respect for 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 religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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 has an area of 10,985 square miles and its population was approximately 538 thousand. Most citizens were members of the following Christian churches: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist. Traditional indigenous religious believers, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, accounted for an estimated 5 percent of the population. Other groups, such as 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 traditional Christian churches, comprised 2 percent. There were believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community who were free to practice their religions, but they were not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent reports, there were over 200 Muslims in the country.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western churches: the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the London Missionary Society (which became the United Church). Some foreign missionaries continued to work in the country. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy was approximately 50 percent foreign, the clergy of the traditional churches was nearly entirely indigenous, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, United Church (Methodist), South Seas Evangelical Church, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### 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 and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterized this role, on one hand, as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and, on the other hand, maintaining public order. All religious institutions were required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the Government did not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services in the country were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There were schools sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia, 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 included thirty minutes 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 subsidized church schools only if they aligned their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although non-Christian religions may be taught in the schools, there was no such instruction at present. 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 were taken on the Bible; however, religious oaths were forbidden by the constitution and cannot be required.

##### 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 Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 object to the activities of nontraditional denominations and suggest that they be curtailed. However, society in general was tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

During 2003, Guadalcanal militants abducted a number of members of an Anglican religious order and killed seven of them. In June 2003 militant leader Harold Keke was arrested for these and other killings. In March 2005 Keke was convicted of the murder of Father Augustine Geve and sentenced to life imprisonment.

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

The United States government does not have a permanent presence in the country; however, the U.S. embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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