



## Solomon Islands

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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 religions 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 is approximately 538,000. Most citizens are 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, account 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), and indigenous churches that have broken away from traditional Christian churches, comprise 2 percent. There are believed to be members of additional religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religion, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent census figures, there are 12 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 continue to work in the country. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 50 percent foreign, the clergy of the other traditional churches is nearly entirely indigenous. Traditional domestic church missionaries are represented by religions such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, the 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 respects this right in practice.

The Department of Home and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterizes 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 are required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that registration has been denied to any group.

In general, the Government does not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services in the country were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are 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 to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum includes 30 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 subsidizes church schools only if they align their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although theoretically non-Christian religions can be taught in the schools, there is no such instruction at present.

Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible; however, religious oaths are 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.

#### ***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.

#### ***Abuses by Terrorist Organizations***

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period of the report.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, are 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 is 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 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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