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## **2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Samoa**

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### **SAMOA**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion along with freedom of thought and conscience, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. However, local officials at times infringe on these rights.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Both government policy and the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contribute to the free practice of religion.

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. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion**

##### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion along with freedom of thought and conscience, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice; however, local officials at times infringe on these rights.

The preamble to the Constitution acknowledges "an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Nevertheless, while Christianity is constitutionally favored, there is no official or state denomination.

##### **Religious Demography**

As a result of a strong missionary movement in the 19th century, nearly 100 percent of the population is Christian; most of the population is Protestant, although Roman Catholicism is a significant force. Based on the 1991 census, the religious distribution of the population is estimated to be: Congregational Christian Church (43 percent); Catholic (21 percent); Methodist (17 percent); the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (10 percent); and Seventh-Day Adventist (about 3 percent). There are small congregations of other Christian denominations, as well as members of the Baha'i Faith and adherents of Islam. This distribution of church members is reflected throughout the population, but individual villages, particularly small ones, may have only one or two of the major churches represented.

Missionaries operate freely, either as part of one of the established churches, or by conducting independent revival meetings. The major denominations, for example, Congregational, Methodist, Catholic, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, that are present in the country also have missionaries. There is an independent Christian radio and television station.

The Constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious indoctrination in schools but gives each denomination or religion the right to establish its own schools; these provisions are adhered to in practice. There are both religious and public schools; the public schools do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. There are pastoral schools in most villages to provide religious instruction following school hours.

#### Governmental Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Constitution grants each person the right to change religion or belief and to worship or teach religion alone or with others, in practice the matai (village chiefs) often choose the religious denomination of the aiga (extended family). In previous years, despite the constitutional protection, village councils--in the name of maintaining social harmony within the village--sometimes banished or punished families that did not adhere to the prevailing religious belief in the village. In June 1999, 32 persons were convicted of assault and arson in connection with destruction of the home of a family banished by the Salamumu village council for rejecting the Methodist Church. The families instead were holding private prayer meetings at home. The defendants were fined the equivalent of about \$1,000 each. The judge ruled that the village council should have arraigned them. Sentencing was scheduled to have taken place in August 1999.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### **Section II. Societal Attitudes**

A high percentage of the population attends church weekly. There is strong societal pressure at the village and local level to attend church, participate in church services and activities, and support church leaders and projects financially. In some denominations, such financial contributions often total more than 30 percent of family income.

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

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. [end of document]

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