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Mauritius

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

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 were reports of societal abuses and 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 has an area of 718 square miles and a population of 1.3 million.

According to the 2000 census, 48 percent of the population is Hindu, 24 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 9 percent belong to other Christian denominations. Roman Catholics make up 73 percent of the Christian population. The remaining 27 percent are members of the following groups: Seventh-day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Church of England, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, evangelical, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Sunnis account for more than 90 percent of Muslims; a minority are Shi'a. The remaining 2 percent of the population includes Buddhists, animists, and others.

On the main island, the north is primarily Hindu, while the center is mainly Catholic. There are large populations of Muslims and Catholics in the cities of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. The island of Rodrigues is 92 percent Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent are primarily Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for 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.

Parliamentary decree recognizes religious organizations that were present prior to independence, including the Catholic Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims. These groups receive an annual lump sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based on the number of adherents determined by the census. The registrar of associations registers new religious organizations, which must have a minimum of seven members, and the Ministry of Finance grants them tax-exempt privileges. The government reportedly did not refuse registration to any group.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Thaipooam Cavadee, Maha Shivaratee, Ougadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid al-Fitr, Divali, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

The government allowed foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restricted their presence or limited proselytizing activities, religious groups must obtain both a resident and a work permit for each missionary. The prime minister's office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. The government granted residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extension.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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.

The prime minister began the process of securing land to build a new Hindu temple a significant distance from his residence, in response to the May 2009 incident denying a Hindu religious group access to an illegally built temple opposite the prime minister's private residence. The courts postponed, until July 2010, the case regarding two reporters accused of trespassing in the police protection zone in connection with the above incident.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Christians and Muslims, alleged that interference in the government promotion system prevented them from reaching higher-level positions in the civil service. More generally, non-Hindus often claimed underrepresentation in government.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

On March 14, 2010, a group of approximately 15 Hindu men disturbed a religious celebration organized by Light Ministries International, a Pentecostal group, by shouting, "Go home, go home!" The event was a three-day celebration, held in a predominantly Hindu village, with a "Bollywood" comedian who is also a Pentecostal minister in India. Six cars sustained damage, and a fire was set in a nearby sugar cane field. There were reports of an undisclosed number of injured persons

among those attending. Police identified and arrested four men in connection with the incident. All four men, who belong to the Hindu organization Kranti (revolution), were accused of arson and damaging property as a gang. Police investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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