



Mauritius

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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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 was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or 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. In the 2000 census, 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 17 percent Muslim; other religious groups, such as Buddhist and animist, constitute 1 percent. Seventy-three percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. 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.

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. Most mosques and churches are concentrated in these areas. The island of Rodrigues is 92 percent Catholic.

The country has tightly knit ethnic groups, known as "communities." There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity usually are Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are 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. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

In March 2007 the Supreme Court ruled that a mosque could not use loudspeakers for the daily calls to prayer, in accordance with noise prevention regulations. Thereafter, the mosque and neighbors agreed on an acceptable volume for the loudspeakers.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Thaipooam Cavadee, Maha Shivratree, Ougadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid al-Fitr Divali, All Saints Day, and Christmas.

Religious organizations that were present prior to independence, such as the Catholic Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, are recognized by parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based on the number of adherents as determined by the census. The Registrar of Associations registers new religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) and grants them tax-exempt privileges. The Government reportedly did not refuse registration to any group.

The Government allows foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restrict their presence or limit 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 grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extension.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources is responsible for promoting cultural interaction among different cultural groups within the country and sponsored events aimed at fostering cultural programs that included religious components.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

On May 29, 2009, the Commissioner of Police denied devotees access to a Hindu temple illegally constructed on land belonging to in-laws of the Prime Minister and situated opposite the Prime Minister's private residence. The police stated that it presented a "public safety issue" and declared the zone a protected area. The media reported later that residents had filed numerous complaints against the temple for noise pollution. The police arrested two radio reporters on June 9, 2009, for allegedly trespassing in the protected area. On June 12, 2009, the temple reopened to the public after the Prime Minister and the religious society managing the temple agreed that only small religious ceremonies would be held in the current temple until another temple is built to hold larger religious ceremonies.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Christians and Muslims, alleged that they were prevented from reaching higher-level positions in the Government.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

On October 16, 2008, embassy officials discussed the benefits of religious pluralism with political figures and Muslim religious and community leaders during an embassy-hosted Eid al-Fitr dinner.