



Mauritius

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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 period covered by this report.

There were limited reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were reports of increasing animosity among the Hindu population towards the Pentecostal Church, also known as the Assembly of God, due to their proselytizing and the high rate of conversion among Hindus. This prevailing attitude also negatively impacted attitudes towards missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

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 1.2 million. In the 2000 census, an estimated 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 17 percent Muslim; 1 percent was comprised of other religions, such as Buddhism and animism. No official figures exist that distinguish between active practitioners of a faith from inactive believers of that faith. According to the latest 2000 census, 73 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. The remaining 27 percent are members of the following groups: Seventh-day Adventist, Assembly of God, Christian Tamil, Church of England, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons. Sunnis account for more than 90 percent of Muslims; a minority is Shi'a.

According to the 2000 census, on the main island, the north is primarily Hindu, while the center is primarily Catholic. There are also 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 is a small island nation, and its ethnic groups, known as "communal groups," are tightly knit. Inter-marriage is not common, although the census indicated that it is increasing. 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 both Buddhism and Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are Catholic.

Section II. Status of 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 the Noise Prevention Regulations.

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 in a parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based upon the number of adherents as determined by the census. Newer religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) were registered by the Registrar of Associations and were recognized as legal entities with tax-exempt privileges. The Government was not known to have refused registration to any group.

Foreign missionary groups were allowed to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although there are no government regulations restricting their presence or limiting proselytizing activities, groups must obtain both a resident permit and a work permit for each missionary. The Prime Minister's Office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents to missionaries. 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. Residence permits to missionaries are granted for a maximum of 3 years with no extension. During the reporting period, 71 missionaries from various religious groups applied for residence permits, and 170 work/residence permits were renewed.

The Government observes Hindu (Maha Shivratri, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Divali), Tamil (Thaipusam Cavadee, and Ougadi), Christian (Christmas and Assumption of Mary), and Muslim (Eid al-Fitr) holy days as national holidays.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture 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. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Creoles and Muslims, alleged that they were prevented from reaching positions in the higher levels of 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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

Christian religious groups reported a prevailing fear and increased hostility towards Christian proselytizing among the Hindu population due to a high rate of conversion in the Hindu community. Persistent underlying tensions between the Hindu majority and the Christian minority led some members of the Assembly of God (AOG) to question if their success in converting Hindus was the main reason they had not been officially recognized as a religious group. While only anecdotal evidence existed to support this claim, other Christian religious groups confirmed the AOG's successful Hindu community conversion rate as well as the overarching concern in Hindu communities about Christian missionaries seeking to convert Hindus.

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.

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