

TAIWAN 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the authorities generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the authorities' respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

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

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) regularly met with the Taiwan authorities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations as part of its efforts to promote religious freedom. AIT consulted with officials, scholars, and lawmakers on the progress of legislation related to religious freedom, including a bill on domestic services that would allow days off for migrant workers to fulfill their religious duties.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to Ministry of Interior figures from October, the population is 23,293,600. Based on a comprehensive study conducted in 2005, the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) estimates that 35 percent of the population considers itself to be Buddhist and 33 percent Taoist. Although MOI has not tracked data on religious adherence since the 2005 study, it states this estimate might still reflect the situation. MOI does not include religious adherence as a census question, as doing so would constitute an invasion of privacy according to the Personal Data Protection Law. While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents categorize themselves as either Buddhist or Taoist, many adherents consider themselves to be both Buddhist and Taoist.

In addition to organized religious groups, many persons also practice traditional Chinese folk religions, which include some aspects of shamanism, ancestor worship, and animism. Researchers and academics estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions, and Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong is a self-described spiritual

discipline that combines qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of founder Li Hongzhi. Falun Gong is registered as a civic rather than a religious organization. According to an academic source, Falun Gong membership exceeds one million and continues to grow.

Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include I Kuan Tao, Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion), Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Li-ism, Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion), Tian Li Chiao (Tenrikyo), Universe Maitreya Emperor Religion, Hai Tze Tao, Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion), Da Yi Chiao (Great Changes Religion), Pre-cosmic Salvationism, Huang Chung Chiao (Yellow Middle Religion), Roman Catholicism, Islam, the Church of Scientology, the Bahai Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mahikari Religion, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Unification Church, all of which are registered. Unregistered denominations include the Presbyterian, True Jesus, Baptist, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Episcopal churches. The majority of the indigenous population of 507,000 aborigines is Protestant or Roman Catholic. Jews number approximately 130 persons, although they are predominately foreign residents. Some 400,000 migrant workers, primarily from Southeast Asia, differ in religious adherence from the general population. The largest single group of migrant workers is from Indonesia, with a population of more than 200,000 persons who are largely Muslim. Migrant workers from the Philippines are predominately Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Registration for religious organizations is voluntary. Registered religious organizations operate on a tax-free basis and must submit annual reports on their financial operations. The only ramification for non-registration is the forfeiture of tax advantages available for registered religious organizations.

At the end of the year, 27 religious organizations were registered with the MOI's Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register

with local authorities, many choose not to and operate as the personal property of their leaders.

Religious organizations are permitted to operate private schools. Compulsory religious instruction is not permitted in any Ministry of Education (MOE)-accredited public or private elementary, middle, or high school. High schools accredited by the MOE, while not allowed to require religious instruction, may provide elective courses in religious studies, provided such courses do not promote certain religious beliefs over others.

Universities and research institutions may have religious studies departments. There are many private theological institutes. The MOE accredits the Dharma Drum Mountain Community University established by the late Buddhist Master Sheng Yen, the School of Theology of Chang Jung Christian University, the College of Buddhism of Huafan University, the College of Buddhist Studies of Fo Guang University, and the Chief Sun College of Buddhist Studies. According to the MOE, there are nine additional university-level religion departments and/or theological institutes under review for accreditation.

According to the Ministry of Justice, colleges and universities have full authority to design their own curricula. Religious studies programs typically require students to take religious courses, but there is no regulation barring colleges and universities from requiring other, non-religious studies majors to take religious courses. However, to date there are no reports of students being asked to take religious courses against their will.

No religious holidays are treated as national holidays.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Religious leaders and NGOs raised concerns that the law does not guarantee a day off for domestic workers and caregivers, thus limiting their ability to practice fully their religion. An estimated 80,000 foreign workers are Roman Catholic and, in the absence of a guaranteed day off, they could not fulfill their religious duties. Most of the more than 200,000 Indonesian migrant workers are Muslim and also were not able to take a day off during the week to attend services.

The Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) and local governments accepted complaints from workers who believed that their rights and interests were damaged for religious reasons. On May 4, the CLA upheld a city government decision to fine an institution for engaging in religious discrimination. In October 2011, the Taipei City authorities fined a private Roman Catholic school NT\$600,000 (\$19,820) for religious discrimination. The school was accused of firing two female American teachers who were Mormons. This was the first case of an employer being fined for religious discrimination. The school had determined the two Mormon teachers actively worked against Catholic beliefs and that one teacher offered extra credit to students who attended Mormon religious services. Local representatives of the Catholic Church stated that a religious school should be permitted to dismiss a teacher if the individual had a conflict with the school's religion and thus appealed the 2011 fine.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 8, in a change of visa policy, the government started granting missionary visas to other orders of religious workers besides priests and nuns. This change granted all male religious orders (priests, brothers, monks) and female religious orders (sisters and nuns) eligibility for visas to conduct religious work. Religious organizations previously complained that only priests and nuns could obtain missionary visas. The immigration law does not have a formal provision for missionary visas for individuals who do not have the rank of priest or nun within their respective religious orders, which includes Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist workers. In the past, the government regularly granted visas to religious workers of some religious groups who were not priests or nuns and uniformly applied the eligibility to all religious groups by year's end.

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

AIT representatives regularly met with the authorities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations as part of AIT's efforts to enhance and promote religious freedom. The social service organizations were involved extensively in the problems of human trafficking and migrant labor and promoted interfaith religious tolerance. In addition to monitoring the media for any reports of

discrimination based on religious beliefs, AIT consulted with officials, scholars, and lawmakers on the progress of legislation related to religious freedom, including a domestic services bill that would allow days off for migrant workers to fulfill their religious duties.