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Tonga

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 is an archipelago with an area of 288 square miles and a population of 123,000. According to 2006 census data, membership by percentage of population of major religious groups is Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 37.3 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 16.8 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 15.6 percent; and Roman Catholic Church, 11.3 percent. All other Christian denominations, namely the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and Anglicans, in total account for 14 percent. Followers of the Bahai Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Hindus, observers of Chinese traditional festivals, and Buddhists together constitute 4 percent of the population; the remaining 1 percent declined to state their religious affiliation, if any.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the government for tax purposes but is not required. All religious groups are permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

The constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all other businesses, regardless of a business owner's religion.

A number of religious groups including Mormons, Free Wesleyan Church, Catholics, Anglicans, Seventh-day Adventists, and Bahai operated schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

The government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." All religious groups are permitted to host programs on Radio Tonga and TV Tonga, but discussions of the basic tenets of non-Christian religions are not permitted. Notices of activities of all churches were broadcast on both Radio Tonga and TV Tonga as well as on privately owned radio and television stations.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country and operate freely.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom with the government and nongovernmental organizations as part of the U.S. government's overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country; the U.S. ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is accredited to the government.

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