



## Fiji

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago of more than 300 islands with a total area of 7,050 miles and a population of 918,700. Most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. Estimates of religious affiliation were as follows: 52 percent of the population is Christian, 30 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which claims approximately 218,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also have significant followings. The Methodist Church is supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remains influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There also is a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religious affiliation runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute 54 percent of the population, are Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who account for an estimated 38 percent of the population, practice Hinduism, while 20 percent follow Islam. In addition, an estimated 6 percent of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese, Rotumans, Europeans, and other Pacific Islanders. Approximately 60 percent of the small Chinese community practices Christianity and 4 percent adheres to Confucianism. The very small European community is predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintain a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations are nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, most notably the Methodist Church, have missionaries in the country. The missionaries operate numerous religious schools, including colleges, not subsidized by the Government.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. There is no state religion. Religious groups are not required to register. The Government did not restrict foreign clergy, domestic or foreign missionary activity, or other activities of religious organizations.

The Government recognizes major holy days of the predominant religions as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Government partially sponsored an annual ecumenical prayer festival.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continued to be a political issue. Younger Methodist leaders have in recent years moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous church leadership.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### 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 isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. From March 2006 to March 2007 incidents of sacrilege decreased somewhat from the previous year. Of the 40 incidents reported, 70 percent consisted of unidentified persons robbing and desecrating Hindu temples. There were 12 acts of desecration of churches and none of mosques. Police surmised that this vandalism had more to do with theft than with religious intolerance. In 2006, several Hindu members of Parliament called on law enforcement authorities to take more stringent action to prevent attacks on Hindu temples and punish perpetrators.

There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream seeking to establish congregations in some villages and outer islands. In a few cases, local traditional leaders prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy disseminated materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society.

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