



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Palau

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

An archipelago of more than three hundred islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles, and its population is approximately twenty-thousand persons; 70 percent live in the temporary capital, Koror. There were nineteen Christian denominations. Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion; approximately 65 percent of the population was members. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership included the Evangelical Church, two thousand; Seventh-day Adventists, one thousand; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), three-hundred; and Jehovah's Witnesses, ninety. Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, had approximately eight-hundred adherents. There also was a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately five-thousand persons). A large percentage of citizens did not actively practice their faith.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early nineteenth century, foreign missionaries have been active; some have been in the country for many years. A number of groups had missionaries in the country on proselytizing or teaching assignments, including the Apostolic Foundation, Baha'i Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Evangelical Church, High Adventure Ministries, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, Korean Church, Korea Presbyterian Church, Pacific Missionary Aviation, Palau Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist and Evangelical churches had missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

#### 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 does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities; however, the Government regulates the establishment of religious organizations by requiring them to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the period covered by this report. As nonprofit organizations, churches and missions are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any persons during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. There is government financial support for religious schools that may be requested by representatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday. There is active participation by the majority of the country's religious groups in Easter and Christmas services. Even though the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, activities such as national and state events or public and private graduations are always conducted with a prayer to open the ceremonies.

##### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of

Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stemmed from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens following complaints from employers that workers' religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employing families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there were no impediments to their practice of religion

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 Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The various religious organizations maintained cordial relations with each other.

#### 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. U.S. embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

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