

# TAIWAN 2013 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. Taiwan labor law, however, does not guarantee domestic service workers and caretakers a right to a day off, effectively making it difficult or impossible for such workers to attend religious services.

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, including on the issue of days off for domestic service workers that might be used for religious purposes.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 23.3 million. 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 remains largely unchanged. MOI does not include religious adherence as a census question, as doing so would constitute an invasion of privacy according to the 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 might overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also might be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions with Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong is a self-described spiritual

## TAIWAN

discipline, and is registered as a civic rather than a religious organization. According to the Falun Gong Society of Taiwan, Falun Gong membership exceeds one million in over 1,000 branches island-wide and continues to grow. However, authorities do not track Falun Gong membership statistics, and the Falun Gong Society has acknowledged difficulty in accurately estimating membership within its loose coalition of adherents, many of whom do not meet on a regular basis.

Religious 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, Presbyterian, True Jesus, Baptist, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Episcopal churches. The majority of the indigenous population of 530,000 (as of June) is Protestant or Roman Catholic. Followers of Judaism number about 120 persons (as of August), and 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 203,720 (as of June) 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 generally 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 of non-registration is the lack of tax advantages available for registered religious organizations.

There are 27 religious organizations registered with the MOI's Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register through island-wide associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to and operate as the personal property of their leaders.

## TAIWAN

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 institutions of higher learning of religious groups. According to the MOE, it has accredited five such institutions and there are 10 university-level religious colleges and/or theological institutes under review for MOE accreditation. Most of the institutions still awaiting accreditation have been waiting for three years or more because they are unable to meet the minimum funding requirements for accreditation – currently NT\$50 million (\$1.7 million) – or are unable to meet mandated city or county government-enforced property usage and environmental impact standards. According to the MOE, colleges and universities have full authority to design their own curricula.

### **Government Practices**

Religious leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) raised concerns that the law does not guarantee a day off for the approximately 200,000 domestic workers and caregivers, and thus limited their ability to attend religious services. Most of the approximately 90,000 foreign workers from the Philippines are Roman Catholic and most of the more than 200,000 Indonesian migrant workers are Muslim. The majority of these individuals are engaged as domestic workers and caregivers.

The Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) and local governments were responsible for accepting complaints from workers who believed that their rights and interests were damaged for religious reasons. The CLA said it did not receive any complaints of religious discrimination from workers in 2012 and 2013.

### **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**

## TAIWAN

AIT representatives regularly met with the authorities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations. AIT encouraged the authorities to continue efforts on behalf of respect for religious freedom and encouraged NGOs regarding continued advocacy on behalf of freedom of religion and promotion of 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 issue of a day off for domestic services workers.