



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### New Zealand

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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

The law 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

The country is an island nation with an area of approximately 99,000 thousand square miles, and its population is an estimated 4,140,000. The country is predominantly Christian but was becoming more religiously diverse. According to the 2001 census, approximately 55 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian or members of individual Christian denominations. Three major Christian denominations: Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist experienced a decline in membership between 1996 and 2001, while the Roman Catholic Church showed a slight increase. The Maori Christian churches, which integrate Christian tenets with precolonial Maori beliefs and include Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth. The number of Pentecostals declined by an estimated 19 percent between 1996 and 2001 to less than 1 percent of the population. During the same period non Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration.

According to 2001 census data, percentages of religious affiliation were: Anglican, 15.2 percent; Roman Catholic, 12.7 percent; Presbyterian, 10.9 percent; Christian (no more specific identification), 5 percent; Methodist, 3.1 percent; Baptist, 1.3 percent; Ratana (a Maori/Christian group with services in the Maori language), 1.3 percent; Buddhist, 1.1 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints (Mormons), 1 percent; and Hindu, 1 percent. There were also more than ninety religious groups that each constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In addition 26.8 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation, 6.2 percent objected to answering the survey question, and 5.5 percent did not state affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tended to be followers of Presbyterianism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian faiths such as Ratana and Ringatu. The Auckland statistical area, which accounts for approximately 30 percent of the country's population, exhibited the greatest religious diversity. Farther south on the North Island, and on the South Island, the percentage of citizens who identified themselves with Christian faiths increased, while those affiliated with non-Christian religions decreased.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The law 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.

The Education Act of 1964 specifies in its "secular clause" that teaching within public primary schools "shall be entirely of a secular character"; however, it also permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day within specified limits for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors. However, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Legal Division of the Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of individual school boards. The ministry does not keep centralized data on how many schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, the curriculum division stated that religious instruction, if provided at a school, usually was scheduled after normal school hours.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act of 1975, the Government, in response to its burgeoning general primary school role and to financial difficulties experienced by a large group of Catholic parochial schools, permitted the incorporation of private schools into the public school system. Designated as "integrated schools," they were deemed to be of a "unique character" and were permitted to receive public funding provided that they also enrolled nonpreference students (students who did not fit within the "unique character" of the school;

for example, non-Catholic students who attended a Catholic school). A total of 326 of the 2,607 schools of all levels were integrated schools with this designation. As of July 2005 there were 238 Catholic schools, 75 schools with other religious affiliation, and 13 schools with no religious affiliation integrated into the public school system. A student cannot be required to attend an integrated school; admission to such a school is based on a student's request.

In 2003, the Office of Human Rights Proceedings (an independent component of the Human Rights Commission) settled a case in which the employer of a complainant (a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) breached the Human Rights Act of 1993 by requiring the latter to work on his Saturday Sabbath. The employer acknowledged breaching the act, paid a fine of \$25,000 (NZD 40,000), awarded a one-time six-week leave benefit, and agreed to an alternative roster so that the complainant would not be required to work on Saturdays.

For the year ended June 30, 2005, the Human Rights Commission received 1,862 complaints having an element of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. 4.3 percent of these complaints were classified as unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief.

Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter are official holidays.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, some businesses were fined if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Christmas Day, Good Friday, or Easter Sunday. (Australia New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) day is the only nonreligious holiday that carries similar fines.) The small but growing non-Christian communities have called for the Government to take into account the country's increasingly diverse religious makeup and offer greater holiday flexibility. In response the Government removed some constraints on trade associated with the Christian faith. In 2001, it enacted legislation that permits several types of businesses to remain open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. These businesses included those providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

The Government does not require licensing or registration before it will recognize a religious group. However, if a religious group desires to collect money for the promotion of religion or charitable causes and wishes to be recognized by the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) to obtain tax benefits, then it must register with the IRD as a charitable trust. There is no fee for this registration.

The country has two registered Christian-associated political parties. There are no other religiously affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions.

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. Incidents of religiously motivated violence were extremely rare. Due to the infrequency of their occurrence and difficulty in establishing such motivation, the police do not attempt to maintain data on crimes that may have been motivated by religion.

In November 2005, a man was convicted and sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment for abuse directed at Muslims at a bus stop and on a bus in South Dunedin. Also in November 2005, a court sentenced two former members of the National Front, a white supremacist group, to twelve months' imprisonment for vandalizing mosques in Auckland following the July 2005 subway bombings in London. In July 2005, the person charged in 2004 for sending racist letters to members of Wellington's Somali community and other Muslims was convicted of harassment, and in September 2005 he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

The government-funded Human Rights Commission actively promoted tolerance on the issue of religious freedom.

#### 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 U.S. embassy maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities, and includes them at its sponsored events.

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