



New Zealand

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

October 26, 2009

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

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 island nation with an area of 103,000 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. According to 2006 census data, percentages of religious affiliation are: Anglican, 14.8 percent; Roman Catholic, 13.6 percent; Presbyterian, 10.7 percent; Methodist, 3.3 percent; other Protestant denominations, 8.2 percent; Christian (no affiliation specified), 5 percent; Buddhist, 1.7 percent; Hindu, 1.7 percent; and Muslim, 1 percent. Over 90 additional religious groups together constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In addition, 34.7 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian groups such as Ratana and Ringatu. The Auckland area, which accounts for approximately 33 percent of the country's population, is home to the greatest religious diversity.

While the country is predominantly Christian, recent trends indicate that it is becoming more religiously diverse. According to the 2006 census, approximately 56 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian, a 5 percent decrease from the 2001 census. Within the Christian community, Anglicans and Presbyterians exhibited a decline between 2001 and 2006, while the number of self-identified Pentecostals and "Evangelical, Born Again, and Fundamentalist Christians" increased by 17.8 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively. Syncretistic Maori Christian churches such as Ratana and Ringatu also experienced significant growth, and the proportion of Roman Catholics and Methodists grew slightly. During the same period, non-Christian religious groups continued to show steady growth rates, driven primarily by immigration.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion and contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all

levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Providing that religious practices do not breach the peace, religious expression is unrestricted.

During the reporting period, the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC) continued implementation of its Statement on Religious Diversity published in February 2007, which aims to guarantee equal treatment under the law of all faiths, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. To this end, the Commission facilitated a national interfaith network with a monthly electronic newsletter and held its annual Interfaith Policy Forum in March 2009.

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 Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of individual school boards. The Ministry does not keep 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 financial difficulties experienced by a large group of Catholic parochial schools, permitted the incorporation of private schools into the public school system. Designated as "state integrated schools," they are deemed to be of a "special character" and receive public funding. Enrollment priority is given to "preference" students who share the special character of the school (for example Catholic students desiring to enroll in a Catholic school). State integrated schools also admit non-preference students (for example, non-Catholics in a Catholic school), but a student cannot be required to attend a state integrated school; admission is voluntary. As of July 2008, there were 328 state integrated schools.

On March 26, 2009, the police released a new edition of "A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity" as a guide for its officers. The publication contains information on various faiths and religious practices in the country and is designed to assist police in working within diverse religious communities. The guide also sets out basic human rights principles concerning religious diversity.

During the reporting period, the HRC received 1,225 complaints having an element of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. Of these complaints, 57 (5 percent) were classified as unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief or lack of religious belief. This percentage is generally consistent with the proportion of complaints relating to religion since 2005.

In the event that a complaint to the HRC is not resolved satisfactorily with the assistance of HRC mediation, the complainant may proceed to the Human Rights Review Tribunal. The Tribunal has the authority to issue restraining orders, award monetary damages, or declare a breach of the Human Rights Act (which is reported to Parliament). During the reporting period, the Tribunal did not issue any decisions relating to religious discrimination, nor were any such cases pending.

Conduct that is prohibited by the Human Rights Act may also be prosecuted under other laws. Therefore, in addition to the dispute resolution mechanism offered by the HRC, a complainant may initiate proceedings in the court system. According to the Department of Justice, there were no such proceedings considered by the courts during the reporting period.

The Government does not require the licensing or registration of religious groups. However, if a religious group

desires to collect money for any charitable purpose, including the advancement of its religion, and wishes to obtain tax benefits, then it must register with the Inland Revenue Department as a charitable trust. There is no fee for this registration.

The country has three 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.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some businesses were fined up to \$600 (NZ\$1,000) if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas Day. The Government prosecuted 32 businesses for violations of this law during the reporting period. The Government exempts businesses providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no instances of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In October 2007 six Jewish gravestones in the Wellington Karori Cemetery were desecrated with swastikas and anti-Semitic epithets. No one had been charged in the incident and the investigation remained open at the end of the reporting period.

There were several demonstrations against Israeli policies in early 2009, but none appeared to be directed against Judaism or Jewish persons.

Incidents of religiously motivated violence are extremely rare, and none were reported to the HRC or in the news media during the reporting period.

The HRC actively promoted religious tolerance. In addition to its efforts to implement its Statement on Religious Diversity, the HRC maintains an ongoing Diversity Action Program, of which respect for religious diversity is a pillar.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities and included them at sponsored events when appropriate. The Embassy maintained ongoing, open dialogue with all local interlocutors on the topics of religious freedom, tolerance, diversity, and related issues.