

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states no law may be passed respecting the establishment of a state religion or impairing the free exercise of religion. Government assistance may be provided to religiously affiliated schools for nonreligious purposes. The Ahmadi Muslim community in Kosrae State continued to face incidents of discrimination in receiving public services, such as water delivery.

The Inter-Denominational Council existed to address social problems and promote official cooperation among most Christian groups; other groups, including members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses, reported the council's charter was not inclusive. Ahmadi Muslims reported incidents of vandalism to their religious centers and homes.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with national and state governments and worked with faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in its efforts to promote religious tolerance. In addition, the embassy promoted religious tolerance through social media and its civil society outreach programs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 105,000 (July 2016 estimate). According to government statistics, approximately 99 percent of the population identify as Christian. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. According to the Office of Statistics, 55 percent of long-term residents are Roman Catholic and 42 percent are Protestant. The United Church of Christ is the main Protestant denomination. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups exist in very small numbers, including Bahais, Ahmadi Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center report, 2.7 percent follow folk religions.

In Kosrae State, 90 percent of the population is Protestant, with the Congregational Church the most prominent. In Pohnpei State, the population is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics – more Protestants live on the western side of

Pohnpei, while more Catholics live on the eastern side. In Chuuk State, an estimated 60 percent is Catholic and 40 percent is Protestant. In Yap State, an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder is Protestant. Religious affiliation often tends to follow clan lines.

The majority of foreign workers are Filipino Catholics, who number approximately 850.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion, although the government may fund nonreligious activities in religiously-affiliated schools. The constitution provides for the free exercise of religion. It also provides that the traditions of the country may be protected by statute and, if such statute is challenged as violating rights provided in the constitution, protection of the tradition “shall be considered a compelling social purpose warranting such governmental action.”

There are no registration requirements for religious groups. There is no religious education in public schools, but religion is taught in private religious schools in addition to the curriculum established by the Department of Education.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

During the year, Ahmadi Muslims reported continuing incidents of discrimination and denial of services in predominantly Protestant Kosrae State. The community reported a local government refused to provide it with water services; a neighboring municipality provided them instead. An Ahmadi imam reported local merchants also denied service to Ahmadis based on anti-Muslim statements by state government officials, such as those saying Christians should not serve non-Christians.

National and state government activities and events routinely opened and closed with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic clergy member, and often from one of each group.

The government continued to provide grants to private, church-affiliated schools. The government continued to make no distinction between public and private schools in its grants programs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Inter-Denominational Council (of Christian churches) in Pohnpei existed to address social problems and promote official cooperation among its member Christian groups. The council met monthly and conducted a youth program and hosted a thanksgiving service to support Christian unity. Other groups, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, reported the council's charter was not inclusive. Such councils were not known to exist in other states.

Ahmadi Muslims reported incidents of vandalism, including graffiti and stone throwing, at their religious centers and homes.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and held regular meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and senior cabinet officials. They stressed the primacy of the constitution over local laws or practices that potentially privilege one religious group over others. With both national and state levels of government, the embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through social media and direct outreach to students, women's groups, and local leaders. The embassy also worked with faith-based NGOs to promote religious tolerance. In Kosrae State, embassy officials regularly met with local religious leaders and state government officials on religious tolerance based on the constitution.