

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states no law may be passed to establish a state religion or impair the free exercise of religion. The government may provide assistance to religiously affiliated schools for nonreligious purposes. Observers stated Kosrae State government leaders expressed differing opinions regarding tolerance and respect for smaller religious groups. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae State did not report any threats to individuals or incidents of vandalism unlike in previous years, but members stated they believed this was due to a decrease in their numbers residing there.

Some Christians continued to advocate amending the constitution to prohibit the presence of non-Christian religious groups. The Inter-Denominational Council in Pohnpei continued to address social problems and promote official cooperation among most Christian groups. Ahmadi Muslims reported instances of harassment on social media platforms.

U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom and tolerance with national and state governments. Embassy officers also had discussions with religious leaders and organized events at public and private secondary schools to promote religious inclusion and religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 103,000 (midyear 2019 estimate). According to government statistics, approximately 99 percent of the population identifies as Christian. Several Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church are present in every state. According to government statistics, 55 percent of long-term residents are 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, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups exist in small numbers, including approximately 45 Ahmadi Muslims, with a variable expatriate population of Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and other Muslims. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center report, the

most recent published on folk religions in Micronesia, 2.7 percent of the population followed 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 divided evenly between Protestants and Catholics, although more Protestants live on the western side and more Catholics live on the eastern side. In Chuuk State, an estimated 60 percent is Catholic and 40 percent Protestant. In Yap State, an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder Protestant. Religious affiliation often follows clan lines.

The majority of foreign workers are Filipinos, who number more than 1,000 and are mostly Catholic. The Fijian community comprises fewer than 100 individuals and is predominately Christian.

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. 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 a group to operate as a religious entity.

While there is no religious education in public schools, private schools teach religion in addition to the curriculum established by the Department of Education. The government may fund nonreligious activities in religiously affiliated schools.

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

Government Practices

The Ahmadi imam in Pohnpei State reported the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae did not experience any incidents of threatening behavior, vandalism or intimidation, unlike in previous years. The imam said that he believed the

community's relationship with the local community and government had improved because of its decreased numbers, noting the migration of some members to the United States and other areas of the Pacific. The imam praised President David Panuelo's public statements promoting respect for all religions. In October Panuelo told the 26th International Law and Religion Symposium in Utah, "(our) Constitution guarantees freedom of religion; you cannot have one without the other."

Government leaders did not take any position on the public statements of some Christian leaders calling for the exclusion of non-Christians and/or prohibition on open practice of non-Christian religions.

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

Kosrae State government officials expressed differing opinions regarding tolerance and respect for smaller religious groups.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Ahmadiyya Muslim community members in Pohnpei State reported being harassed on social media by individuals who appeared to be citizens residing outside the country. The harassment associated the Ahmadis with Muslim extremist groups and called for the expulsion of Muslim communities from the country. The Muslim community did not raise incidents of harassment with the government.

Some Christians on social media continued anonymously to advocate amending the constitution to prohibit the presence of non-Christian religious groups, and some pastors opposed allowing non-Christians to practice openly. Other commentators said freedom of religion was a basic human right.

The council of the United Church of Pohnpei stated it promoted unity among religious groups by addressing local social problems and promoting cooperation among religious communities. Council officials noted that the council met

annually with other religious groups in the country to promote unity and cooperation.

Ahmadi Muslims said they continued outreach through youth after-school sports and homework programs in Kosrae and Pohnpei States, in addition to adult evening faith programs.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The embassy discussed religious freedom in meetings with senior cabinet and state government officials and leaders of religious communities. Embassy officials stressed the primacy of the constitution over local laws or practices that potentially privilege one religious group over others.

In Yap and Chuuk States, embassy officials met with representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist School and Church, the International Christian School and Church of God, and the Catholic School and Church to discuss religious tolerance.