

SOLOMON ISLANDS 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for religious freedom, including the freedom to change religions, proselytize, and establish religious schools. This freedom can be made subject to laws “reasonably required” to achieve certain listed public goals.

A Seventh-day Adventist Church was reportedly burned down on the island of Anuta by local Anglican Church leaders, and there were reports of violence within religious groups.

The U.S. government, through the embassy in Papua New Guinea and its consular agency office in country, discussed religious freedom with the government during the year. Representatives from the embassy also met with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 622,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the government census and independent anthropological research, approximately 90 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican Church of Melanesia, 33 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; and United Methodist, 10 percent. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio ethnic community on the island of Malaita, adheres to indigenous, animistic religions. Groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, Bahais, Jehovah’s Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), members of the Unification Church, and members of indigenous churches that have broken away from major Christian denominations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the freedom to practice, change, and proselytize for the individual and community. It also provides for the freedom to establish noncompulsory religious instruction. These provisions can be made subject to

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laws “reasonably required” to protect the rights of others or for defense or public safety, order, morality, or health. No such laws have been reported.

All religious groups must register with the government. Religious groups are required to apply in writing to the Registrar of Companies for a certificate of registration. The registrar will issue a certificate when satisfied that the nature, extent, objectives, and circumstances of the applicant are noncommercial. There have been no reports of groups being denied registration.

The public school curriculum included an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed by the member churches of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), an ecumenical nongovernmental organization comprising the county’s five largest churches. Parents were able to have their children excused from religious education. Government-subsidized church schools were required to align their other curricula with governmental criteria. Non-Christian religious instruction was provided in the schools upon request.

Government Practices

The government interacted with religious groups through the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs characterized its role as maintaining a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and maintaining public order.

Religious groups operated several schools and health services. The government subsidized most of the schools administered by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the United Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. There were no reports of discrimination among groups in receiving these subsidies.

Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible, but this was not a compulsory practice.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were societal disputes within faith communities, particularly in rural areas, that sometimes resulted in violence. Violence occurred when control over financial or land assets of the faith community was at stake and was accompanied

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by ethnic, tribal, or political divisions within a community, according to local observers.

According to media reports, in August, a Seventh-day Adventist Church was burned down on the island of Anuta by local Anglican Church leaders. The son of the island's chief reportedly said the Adventist's beliefs were not acceptable to Anuta's chiefly traditions and asked Adventists to leave the island.

The five largest religious groups that make up SICA continued to play a leading role in civic life, organizing joint religious activities and encouraging religious representation at national events.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. government representatives from the embassy in Papua New Guinea, and its consular agency office in country, discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy staff met with representatives of the Bahai community, Church of Melanesia, South Seas Evangelical Church, and Catholic nuns to discuss and highlight the importance of religious freedom.