

KIRIBATI 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Although the U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji was accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy in Fiji visited the country and discussed religious freedom issues with the government and nongovernmental organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to preliminary figures from the 2010 census, Kiribati's population was approximately 103,100. The 2005 census showed that the major religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church (55 percent of the population); the Kiribati Protestant Church (36 percent); The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (3 percent); the Bahai Faith (2 percent); and the Seventh-day Adventist Church (2 percent). The Mormon Church claims to have a higher number of adherents, totaling 15,364 members or 15 percent of the estimated population. Persons with no religious affiliation account for less than 1 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic Church are concentrated in the northern islands, while Protestants constitute the majority in the southern islands.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

There is no state religion. The government does not favor a particular religious group.

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Although the law requires that a religious organization must be able to claim a certain percentage of the population as members before it may register, there are no consequences for not registering. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is not registered, is able to perform marriages, own property, and operate schools and churches without interference from the government.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter, Christmas, and National Gospel Day.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice.

Most governmental meetings and events began and ended with an ordained minister or other church official delivering a Christian prayer.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

There were occasional problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream that wanted to proselytize in some villages and on outer islands. To avoid conflict, some of these groups did not attempt to proselytize in villages where they felt unwelcome.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. government did not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji also was accredited to the government. Representatives of the embassy in Fiji visited the country and discussed religious freedom issues with the government and nongovernmental organizations. The embassy also placed opinion pieces and articles on religious freedom and tolerance with regional media that were widely read in Kiribati.