

MAURITIUS 2013 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.

There were no reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims, however, continued to exist.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives promoted religious freedom through public diplomacy programs and engagement with the government and civil society. Embassy representatives frequently attended ceremonies and celebrations of religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.3 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 48 percent is Hindu, 26 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 6 percent other Christian, including Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of the Assemblies of God. The remaining 3 percent includes Buddhists, animists, and others. More than 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni.

On the main island, the population of the city of Port Louis is primarily Muslim and Roman Catholic, while the majority of the rest of the island's population is Hindu. The island of Rodrigues is 90 percent Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent are primarily Catholic.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

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A parliamentary decree recognizes religious groups that were present prior to independence, including Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims. These groups receive an annual lump sum payment from the finance ministry based on the number of their adherents as determined by the census. Since the 1972 census, questions related to ethnic or communal affiliation as required by the constitution are no longer asked, although the population is now asked to self-identify their religion. The registrar of associations registers new religious groups, which must have a minimum of seven members. The finance ministry grants these new groups tax-exempt privileges.

The government allows foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restrict their presence or limit proselytizing, religious groups must obtain both a residence permit and a work permit for each missionary. The prime minister's office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are unofficial limits on the overall number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. The government grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extensions.

Government Practices

Some Christians and Muslims alleged that the predominance of Hindus in the upper echelons of the civil service resulted in "interference" in the government promotion system, and prevented them from reaching higher-level positions in the civil service. More generally, non-Hindus often claimed underrepresentation in government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims continued to exist, however. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize these tensions specifically as motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance.

There were no new developments in the August 2012 case involving a Hindu woman who allegedly posted anti-Muslim comments on a social network site.

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Unlike the previous year, there were no reports that private companies refused to employ Muslim women wearing the hijab.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and embassy representatives continued to promote religious freedom through outreach and engaging the government on religious freedom issues, advocating continued respect for diversity. The embassy hosted an annual iftar to promote religious tolerance, and regularly attended religious ceremonies and celebrations of various religious groups.