

KIRIBATI 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 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 U.S. Embassy in Suva, Fiji, visited the country and discussed religious freedom issues with the government and nongovernmental organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 103,000 (July 2013 estimate). The 2010 census showed that the major religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church (56 percent of the population); the Kiribati Protestant Church (34 percent), and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (5 percent). Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include the Bahai Faith (2 percent), the Seventh-day Adventist Church (2 percent), Jehovah's Witnesses, Assembly of God, and Muslims. The Mormon Church says it has a higher number of adherents, with membership exceeding 16,000. 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 generally protect religious freedom. The constitution also provides for the freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association.

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.

Government Practices

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 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.