

# **SOLOMON ISLANDS 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 abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most members of society were tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

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

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 597,000 (July 2013 estimate). 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. These five groups make up the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), an ecumenical nongovernmental organization that plays a leading role in the civic life of the country. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio 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, 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/Policy Framework**

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

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The Ministry of Home Affairs characterizes its role as maintaining a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and maintaining public order. All religious groups must register with the government, which routinely approves such requests. 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 non-commercial.

Religious groups operate several schools and health services. The government subsidizes 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.

The public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed by the five member churches of the SICA. Parents may have their children excused from religious education. Government subsidized church schools must align their curricula with governmental criteria. Non-Christian religious instruction may be provided in the schools upon request.

Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible. The constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of significant government actions affecting religious freedom.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice was not prevalent. Nonetheless, there were societal disputes over religious doctrine within faith communities, particularly in rural areas, that sometimes resulted in violence. Violence most frequently occurred when control over financial or land assets of the faith community were at stake and was accompanied by ethnic, tribal, or political divisions within a community.

In general members of society were tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities. The SICA organized joint religious activities and encouraged religious representation at national events.

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### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. government through the Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and its consular agency office in the country, discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy staff met with sisters from the Catholic Church to discuss and highlight the importance of religious freedom.