

KIRIBATI 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion. There is a registration requirement for religious groups that represent at least 2 percent of the population, but there is no consequence for not registering. There were no reports of significant government action restricting religious freedom.

There were no reports of significant societal action affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government and officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji discussed religious freedom with the government, religious groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 104,000 (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2010 census, approximately 56 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 34 percent is Kiribati Protestant, and 5 percent belongs to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Groups that together 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 Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience (including religion), expression, assembly, and association. These rights may be limited by law "which is reasonably required" in the interests of public defense, safety, order, morality, or health; or to protect the rights of others.

There is no state religion.

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By law any religious group with adult members representing no less than 2 percent of the total population (at latest census) must register with the government. The religious organization submits a request to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Social Affairs, signed by the head of the group and supported by five other members of the organization. Also required in the request is information and proof of the number of adherents, and the religious denomination and name under which it wishes to be registered. Observers have noted that 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, other than lack of an income tax exemption, which is not an issue for most religious groups.

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 no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

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, religious groups, and NGOs. The embassy posted content promoting religious freedom and tolerance on its website.