

NAURU 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, and for freedom to change one's religion or beliefs. Although the law requires registration for religious groups to conduct a full range of activities, religious groups stated they could conduct most normal functions without registration. Although The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) was, as in previous years, unable to register during the year, representatives of the Church stated it made progress towards registration and was optimistic the Church would obtain some form of official recognition after Covid-19 restrictions in the country were fully lifted.

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

The U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. The embassy and the Ambassador utilized social media platforms to promote religious pluralism and tolerance, including highlighting comments by the U.S. President and posts during major Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim celebrations, including Diwali and Ramadan, in support of religious tolerance and practices.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10,000 (midyear 2021). According to the 2011 national census, approximately 95 percent of the population is Christian. The Nauru Congregational Church (which includes the Nauru Protestant Church) is the largest Christian group, constituting 36 percent of the population, followed by the Roman Catholic Church at 33 percent, the Nauru Independent Assembly of God at 13 percent, and the Nauru Independent Church at 10 percent. Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ each constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Two percent of the population reports no religious affiliation. Ethnic Chinese residents, estimated to constitute 5 percent of the population, are Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious.

According to several nongovernmental organizations and the Australian government, as of October 31, 106 persons fleeing their home countries lived in the country, a decline from 211 in 2020 due to resettlement. Most of those coming

to the country were from Muslim-majority countries, although others were Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association, and for freedom to change one's religion or beliefs. These rights may be restricted by any law that is "reasonably required" in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health.

Under the law, religious groups must register with the government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building houses of worship, holding religious services, and officiating at marriages. A 2014 cabinet memorandum sets out requirements for registration of new religious groups, including having at least 750 enrolled members, land, and a building in the country and leadership by a Nauruan member of the clergy, who must reside in the country. The Catholic Church, Nauru Congregational Church, Assemblies of God, Nauru Independent Church, and Seventh-day Adventist Church are officially registered.

Religious groups may operate private schools, and a number do so. In public schools, the government allows religious groups to have a weekly religious education program during school hours, but it does not require schools to offer such education. In schools where religious education is provided, students are required to attend the program led by the representative of their respective religious group. Students whose faith is not represented are required to undertake independent study during the class time devoted to religious education.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Although the law requires registration for religious groups to conduct a full range of activities, local religious leaders stated the government continued to require such recognition only if a denomination's clergy wished to officiate at marriages. Religious groups stated they could conduct most normal functions, including services and meetings, without registration. There were no reports the government discriminated in the registration process, although the requirements make it nearly

impossible for any new group to register. Although the Church of Jesus Christ was, as in previous years, unable to register during the year, representatives of the Church stated it made progress towards registration and were optimistic the Church could obtain some form of official recognition after Covid-19 restrictions in the country are fully lifted.

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 and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. The U.S. government does not maintain an embassy in Nauru.

The embassy and the Ambassador utilized social media platforms to promote religious pluralism and tolerance, including highlighting comments by the U.S. President and posts during major Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim celebrations, including Diwali and Ramadan, in support of religious tolerance and practices.