

## PALAU

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The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

### Section I. Religious Demography

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and a population of 20,800. An estimated 70 percent live in Koror State. Approximately 65 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church, 2,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 1,000; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 300; and Jehovah's Witnesses, 90. Modekneji, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 1,800 adherents. There is a foreign community of more than 6,000; the majority is Filipino Catholic, and there is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims. In addition there are six Chinese Uighur Muslims, former Guantanamo Bay detainees, who arrived in November 2009 for temporary resettlement.

### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

#### Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. Although the government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, prayers are generally offered at government- and nongovernment-sponsored ceremonies and events.

The government does not promote or restrain religious activities. The government requires religious groups to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the government did not deny registration to any group during the reporting period. As nonprofit organizations, churches and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the government denied permits to any persons during the reporting period.

The government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Government financial support for religious schools may be requested by representatives of any religious group. The government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stems from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshis, following complaints from employers that workers' non-Christian religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employee families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there were no impediments to their practice of religion.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

**Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom**

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials maintained regular contacts with the various religious communities.