

NEW ZEALAND

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy and consulate officers continued to meet with the government and with representatives of all major religious communities throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and the role of religion in society. The embassy's public diplomacy efforts regularly included contacts with faith-based communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to 2006 census data, percentages of religious affiliation are: Anglican, 14.8 percent; Roman Catholic, 13.6 percent; Presbyterian, 10.7 percent; Methodist, 3.3 percent; other Protestant denominations, 8.2 percent; Christian (no affiliation specified), 5 percent; Buddhist, 1.7 percent; and Muslim, 1 percent. More than 90 additional religious groups together constitute less than 1 percent of the population. In addition, 39 percent stated no religious affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or syncretistic Maori Christian groups such as Ratana and Ringatu.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Provided that religious practices do not breach the peace, religious expression is unrestricted.

The government does not specifically promote any religion; however, a Christian prayer is recited at the opening of every parliamentary session.

During the year, the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC) continued the implementation of its 2007 Statement on Religious Diversity, which aims to assure equal treatment of all religious groups under the law, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. The HRC facilitated a national interfaith network with a monthly electronic newsletter.

The law provides that teaching within public primary schools “shall be entirely of a secular character;” however, it also permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors; however, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of individual school boards. The ministry does not keep data on how many schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, the curriculum division stated that religious instruction, if provided at a school, usually is scheduled after normal school hours.

Citizens may file complaints of unlawful discrimination to the HRC under the Human Rights Act. In the event that a complaint is not resolved satisfactorily with the assistance of HRC mediation, the complainant may proceed to the Human Rights Review Tribunal. The tribunal has the authority to issue restraining orders, award monetary damages, or declare a breach of the Human Rights Act (which is reported to parliament). During the year, the tribunal did not issue any decisions related to religious discrimination, nor were any such cases pending.

Conduct that is prohibited by the Human Rights Act also may be prosecuted under other laws. Therefore, in addition to the dispute resolution mechanism offered by the HRC, a complainant may initiate proceedings in the court system. According to the Department of Justice, there were no such proceedings considered by the courts during the year.

The government does not require the licensing or registration of religious groups; however, if a religious group desires to collect money for any charitable purpose,

including the advancement of its religion, and wishes to obtain tax benefits, it must register with the Inland Revenue Department as a charitable trust. There is no fee for this registration.

In May 2010 the agriculture minister announced a requirement for pre-slaughter stunning for commercial killing of livestock in the country, a regulation that violates some interpretations of Jewish and Muslim dietary laws. Since the national Muslim community already incorporates pre-stunning as common practice, Halal slaughtering is unaffected by the new code of welfare. In November 2010 the Jewish community received an exemption to the animal slaughter code for kosher slaughter following a protest from the community.

The country has two registered Christian-associated political parties. There are no other religiously affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of 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 year.

Changes to immigration policy made it easier to recruit and retain religious workers to serve their communities, and in December the HRC published guidelines on religious diversity in the workplace, developed in consultation with the government, employers, unions, and religious communities.

Some businesses were fined up to NZD 1,000 (\$750) if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas Day. The government sought prosecution for 31 businesses for violating this law during the year. The government exempts businesses providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

The HRC actively promoted religious tolerance. In addition to its efforts to implement its Statement on Religious Diversity, the HRC maintained a Diversity Action Program, which includes respect for religious diversity.

The police have introduced Police Community Liaison Officers for the Jewish community and have published A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity for all staff. Collaborators on this publication included the Office of Ethnic Affairs, the Human Rights Commission, and several community-based organizations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

During the year, the HRC received 1,635 complaints of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. Of these complaints, 72 were classified as complaints against members of society for unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief or lack of religious belief. This percentage was generally consistent with the proportion of complaints relating to religion since 2005.

Diverse religious communities in Christchurch and throughout the country responded generously to assist the victims of the Christchurch earthquake in February. Representatives of many religious groups were part of the official services of prayer and commemoration.

Incidents of religiously motivated violence were extremely rare, and none were reported to the HRC or in the media during the year. There were a small number of highly publicized incidents involving religious discrimination, particularly related to the wearing of burqas and turbans. These incidents were resolved through open dialogues facilitated by the Office of Ethnic Affairs and Muslim community leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy and consulate officers continued to meet with the government and with representatives of all major religious communities throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and the role of religion in society. The embassy's public diplomacy efforts regularly included contacts with faith-based communities.

The embassy nominated a senior advisor for Muslim outreach from the Office of Ethnic Affairs to participate in Secretary Clinton's Colloquium for Women in Public Service in December. Her program included engagements with business,

government, and NGO leaders to understand better the role that religion and interfaith dialogue play in diverse communities in the United States.