

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

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

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and worked with church-related nongovernmental organizations in its efforts to promote good governance and religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

Although there is linguistic and cultural diversity within each of the country's four states, its culture is overwhelmingly Christian. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. The United Church of Christ is the main Protestant denomination. In Kosrae, 95 percent of the population is Protestant. In Pohnpei the population is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. In Chuuk an estimated 60 percent is Catholic and 40 percent Protestant. In Yap an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder Protestant. In addition to the United Church of Christ, Protestant denominations include Baptists, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventists. Smaller groups include Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Baha'i Faith. The Mormon Church is growing and, in Pohnpei, with over 1,700 members, about 5 percent of the population identifies itself as Mormon. Attendance at religious services is generally high; churches are well supported by their congregations and play a significant role in civil society.

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who have joined local Catholic churches. The Filipino Iglesia Ni Cristo has a church in Pohnpei.

In the 1890s in Pohnpei, interdenominational rivalry and the conversion of clan leaders resulted in religious divisions along clan lines that continue today, although

intermarriage has blurred the lines considerably. More Protestants live on the western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution protects this right against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The constitution's Declaration of Rights forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion.

The government provides a few grants to private, church-affiliated schools. Public schools do not provide religious instruction.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the year. Government functions uniformly open and close with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic pastor or lay deacon, and often from one of each.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

There was no notable tension between the two largest religious groups, Protestants and Catholics, and an Inter-Denominational Council exists to address social problems and promote official cooperation between the two. However, some newer religious groups in the islands, notably the Mormons and the Seventh-day Adventists, reportedly limited their members' interactions with other faith communities and declined to join the council or the Christian Ministerial Association.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and worked with church-related nongovernmental organizations in its efforts to promote good governance and religious tolerance.