

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states no law may establish a state religion or impair the free exercise of religion, although the government may fund non-religious activities in “parochial” schools. There were no reports of government actions affecting constitutional guarantees on the free exercise of religion.

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

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and worked with faith-based NGOs in its efforts to promote religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 106,000 (July 2014 estimate). Although there is linguistic and cultural diversity within each of the country’s four states, its religious character 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. According to the Federated States of Micronesia Office of Statistics, in Kosrae 90 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 is Protestant. In Yap an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder is 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 Bahais. More Protestants live on the western side of Pohnpei, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution’s Declaration of Rights forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion, although the government may fund non-religious activities in “parochial” schools.

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There are no registration requirements for religious groups. There is no religious education in the public schools, but it is part of the curriculum in private religious schools.

Government Practices

Government activities and events routinely opened and closed with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic pastor or lay deacon, and often from one of each.

The government continued to provide a few grants to private, church-affiliated schools. The criterion to obtain grants was the same for all schools.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was no notable tension between the two largest religious groups, Protestants and Catholics. An Inter-Denominational Council existed to address social problems and promote official cooperation between the two religious groups. Some newer religious groups, notably the Mormons and the Seventh-day Adventists, declined to join the council or the Christian Ministerial Association.

The majority of foreign workers are Filipino Catholics, who have joined local Catholic churches. Historic interdenominational rivalry and the conversion of clan leaders in Pohnpei resulted in religious divisions along clan lines, although intermarriage has blurred the lines considerably.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and held regular meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and senior cabinet officials. Building on an event the embassy co-hosted in 2013, various religious groups worked together to host another international Christmas event.