

PALAU 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for religious freedom and prohibits the government from taking any action to compel, prohibit, or hinder the exercise of religion. On January 11, the government commemorated the National Day of Prayer that “welcomes all expressions of religion, no matter of his or her choosing without reservation or reproach.” The government invited all faiths and denominations to the Capitol for a program of prayers and singing praises.

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

Embassy officials met with senior government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and religious groups throughout the year to discuss the importance of government protection of religious freedom for all groups. Groups with which the embassy interacted included the Palau Baptist Church, Palau Catholic Mission, Palau Seventh-day Adventist Mission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), and representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 22,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to the 2015 national census, approximately 45 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include the Evangelical Church, which constitutes an estimated 26 percent of the population, and Seventh-day Adventists, making up 7 percent. Modekngai, an indigenous religious group that embraces both animist and Christian beliefs, is approximately 6 percent of the population. Muslims constitute an estimated 3 percent, members of the Church of Jesus Christ more than 2 percent, Baptists 1 percent, and adherents of the Assemblies of God 1 percent. Other religious groups make up approximately 10 percent combined. There is an active community of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Within the foreign community of more than 4,000 individuals, the majority is Filipino Catholic. There are also small groups of Filipino, American, and local Baptists; Israeli Jews; and Bangladeshi Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits the government from taking any action to compel, prohibit, or hinder the exercise of religion. It stipulates there shall be no state religion but allows the state to fund “private or parochial” schools on a fair and equitable basis and for nonreligious purposes.

The law requires religious groups to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. As nonprofit organizations, religious groups and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes. To obtain a charter of incorporation, an applicant submits a written petition to the registrar requesting a charter of incorporation and a filing fee of \$250. The Office of the Attorney General reviews the application for statutory compliance and forwards the completed application to the Office of the President for final authorization. The Office of the Attorney General reports it does not deny applications that conform to the corporate registry regulations.

By law, a National Day of Prayer is held each year in January.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Representatives of any religious group, however, may request government financial support for private religious schools. The government earmarks funds for nonreligious purposes for all the recognized private schools operated by Modekngai, Catholic, Evangelical, and Seventh-day Adventist groups. The amount earmarked is based on the number of students attending a particular school. Private schools are not taxed.

Foreign missionaries are required under law to obtain missionary permits at the Bureau of Immigration and Labor. There are no application fees. A foreign missionary applicant must provide police and medical clearances. Letters from the assigning church in the foreign country and accepting church in Palau must be submitted with the application. The permits are valid for a maximum of two years and may be extended with a renewed application.

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

Government Practices

The National Day of Prayer on January 11 gathered religious leaders, schoolchildren, and diplomatic corps members, among others. The government invited all faiths and denominations to the Capitol for a program of prayers and

singing praises. According to the government, the program “welcomes all expressions of religion, no matter of his or her choosing without reservation or reproach.” Participants gave prayers, delivered speeches, and presented awards.

Government-sponsored events featured Christian prayers from various denominations.

Traditional chiefs from various religious groups continued to convene for cultural events across the country.

The government provided funding to nine private schools run by religious groups, distributing a total of \$947,000.

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

U.S. embassy officials met with senior government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs throughout the year to discuss the importance of government protection of religious freedom for all groups, in addition to interfaith relations.

The embassy continued to interact with members of the Palau Baptist Church, Palau Catholic Mission, Palau Seventh-day Adventist Mission, the Church of Jesus Christ, and representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities to promote respect for religious diversity.