

# **PALAU 2019 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 celebrated the National Day of Prayer that “welcomes all expressions of religion, no matter what a person’s choosing is and without reservation or reproach.”

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

U.S. embassy officials met with senior government officials from the Ministry of State and with representatives of religious groups during the year to discuss the importance of government protection of religious freedom for all groups. A U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chaplain made several visits to discuss the importance of religious freedom with the country’s religious leaders. During the visits, the chaplain and embassy officials interacted with the Palau Assembly of God, Palau Baptist Church, Palau Evangelical 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 (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2015 national census, approximately 45 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include the Evangelical Church (26.4 percent); Seventh-day Adventists (6.9 percent); Modekngai, an indigenous religious group embracing both animist and Christian beliefs (5.7 percent); and Muslims (3 percent), primarily Bangladeshi nationals. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ, Baptists, adherents of the Assemblies of God and other religious groups make up approximately 13 percent of the population combined. There are also small numbers of Baha’is, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Within the foreign community of approximately 6,000 individuals, more than half are Filipino Catholic. There are small groups of Filipino, American, and local Baptists, as well as Israeli Jews. The foreign community also includes Japanese, Koreans, Indians, Europeans, Canadians, Australians, Thais, and Chinese, all practicing diverse religious beliefs.

## **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.

Religious groups may obtain charters as nonprofit organizations (NGOs) from the Registrar of Corporations in the Office of the Attorney General. As NGOs, religious groups and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes. To obtain a charter, an applicant must submit a written petition to the Registrar of Corporations and pay a filing fee of \$250. The Registrar of Corporations reviews the application for statutory compliance and then requests the president to sign a charter for the NGO. Applications that meet the requirements of the law result in issuance of charters.

The law empowers the president to proclaim and designate any day in January of each calendar year as a National Day of Prayer.

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 the recognized private schools operated by Modekngei, Catholic Mission, Evangelical, and Seventh-day Adventist religious groups. The amount earmarked is based on the number of students attending a particular school. Private schools do not pay gross revenue tax but pay a flat port clearance fee of \$3 for ordered imported school supplies.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain permits from the Division of Immigration, which is under the Bureau of Immigration and Labor; there are no application fees. Foreign missionary applicants must provide police and medical clearances. Letters from the assigning church in the foreign country and the local accepting church must be submitted with the application. The permits are valid for a maximum of two years and may be renewed.

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

## **Government Practices**

On January 11, the government celebrated the National Day of Prayer and invited religious leaders and members of all faiths and denominations as well as schoolchildren and members of the diplomatic corps to the capital for a program of prayer and song. According to the government, the program “welcomes all expressions of religion, no matter what a person’s choosing is and without reservation or reproach.”

Government-sponsored events, including a Christmas celebration at a park in Koror at which various churches performed, featured Christian prayers from various denominations.

Men and women leaders from traditional religious groups continued to convene for cultural and government events across the country.

The government provided funding to the nine recognized private schools run by religious groups, with support totaling \$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**

Embassy officials met with senior officials from the Ministry of State during the year to discuss the importance of government protection of religious freedom for all groups, in addition to interfaith relations. A U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chaplain made several visits to Palau to discuss the importance of religious freedom with the country’s religious leaders. During the visits, the chaplain and embassy officials interacted with the Palau Assembly of God, Palau Baptist Church, Palau Evangelical Church, Palau Catholic Mission, Palau Seventh-day Adventist Mission, Church of Jesus Christ, and representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Embassy representatives continued to interact with members of the Palau Assembly of God, Palau Baptist Church, Palau Evangelical 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.