

# **NAURU 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, and freedom to change one's religion or beliefs. Smaller churches found the 750-member requirement for registration difficult to meet, although religious groups stated they could conduct most normal functions without registration.

Protestant and Catholic clergy communicated a message of tolerance and brotherhood toward refugees arriving in their communities from an Australian government regional processing facility after being granted residency visas by the government.

Although the U.S. government does not maintain an embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government. U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government and local religious leaders and on national TV and radio.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9,500 (July 2015 estimate). Approximately 95 percent of the population is Christian, of whom two-thirds are Protestant and the remaining one-third Roman Catholic. The Nauru Congressional Church (which includes the Kiribati Protestant Church) is the largest Protestant group with a share of 36 percent of the population, followed by the Roman Catholic Church at 33 percent, the Nauru Independent Assembly of God at 13 percent, and the Nauru Independent Church at 10 percent. Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have small numbers of followers. Ethnic Chinese residents, estimated to constitute 5 percent of the population, are Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious. The Australian government houses approximately 300 asylum seekers in the country of various religious groups from Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Iraq.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

## NAURU

The constitution provides for the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association. These rights may be restricted by any law “which is reasonably required in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health.”

Under the law, religious groups must register with the government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building houses of worship, holding religious services, and officiating marriages. A 2014 cabinet memorandum sets out requirements for registration of religious groups, including having at least 750 enrolled members, land and a building in the country, and leadership by a Nauruan member of the clergy, who must reside in the country. The Catholic Church, the Nauru Congregational Church, the Assemblies of God, and the Nauru Independent Church are officially registered.

### **Government Practices**

Although the law requires registration for religious groups to conduct a full range of activities, local religious leaders stated the government required such recognition only if a denomination’s clergy wished to officiate at marriages. Representatives of the Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists reported that although they had not registered, they had not experienced problems with the government granting visas to their missionaries. There were no reports the government discriminated in the registration process, although leaders of churches with smaller congregations expressed concerns that the 750-person requirement implemented in 2014 was difficult to meet.

As of October authorities had granted five-year residency visas to 808 former asylum seekers, some of whom were Muslim.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Protestant and Catholic clergy communicated a message of tolerance and brotherhood toward refugees to their communities through sermons conducted during visits to the refugee centers. Muslim women wore headscarves in public and refugees belonging to religious minorities established small businesses, worked as community liaison officers and security guards, and found employment as personal assistants with the government.

## NAURU

Missionaries representing several Christian groups were active and stated they operated freely.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is accredited to the government; the U.S. government does not maintain an embassy in the country. U.S. embassy officials met with representatives from the Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, and Jehovah's Witness churches and the relevant ministry in charge of the registration of churches. U.S. embassy officials also discussed religious freedom and promoted religious tolerance on national television and radio programs.