

# **PALAU 2016 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.

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

Embassy officials met with the government and religious groups throughout the year to discuss religious freedom issues. Groups with which the embassy interacted include the Palau Baptist Church, the Palau Catholic Mission, the Palau Seventh-day Adventists Mission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and a representative of the Muslim community.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 21,000. According to the 2015 national census, approximately 45 percent is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include the Evangelical Church, which makes up approximately 26 percent of the population, and Seventh-day Adventists, constituting 7 percent. Mormons make up more than 2 percent. Modekngai, an indigenous religious group that embraces both animist and Christian beliefs, is approximately 6 percent of the population. Muslims make up approximately 3 percent, Baptists 1 percent, and members of the Assembly 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 foreign Baptists 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 will 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 along with 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 attorney general's office reports it does not deny applications that conform to the corporate registry regulations. Foreign missionaries are required under law to obtain missionary permits at the Bureau of Immigration and Labor.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Representatives of any religious group, however, may request government financial support for nonpublic religious schools.

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

### **Government Practices**

Christian prayers from various denominations were offered at government-sponsored events.

The government provided funding to all 10 of the nonpublic schools run by religious groups in the country.

### **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**

U.S. embassy officials met with the government and various religious groups throughout the year to discuss religious freedom and the relationship among the various religious groups. The embassy interacted with members of the Palau Baptist Church, the Palau Catholic Mission, the Palau Seventh-day Adventist Mission, the Mormons, and a representative of the Muslim community.