

# **PALAU 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits the government from taking any action to compel, prohibit, or hinder the exercise of religion. On January 18, the government celebrated the annual National Day of Prayer that “welcomes all expressions of religion...without reservation or reproach.”

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

The Ambassador engaged frequently with religious leaders at a number of events during the course of the year, including a meeting in March with a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 22,000 (midyear 2020 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 of Latter-day Saints, 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, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Jews. Within the foreign community of approximately 6,000, more than half are Filipino Catholic. The foreign community also includes Japanese, Koreans, Indians, Bangladeshis, Europeans, Canadians, Americans, Australians, Thais, Chinese, and Taiwanese, all practicing diverse religious beliefs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuing departure of foreign workers originally from Bangladesh, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan is affecting the religious demography of the country as the population declines.

## **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 recognized private schools operated by Modekngai, Catholic, Evangelical, and Seventh-day Adventist religious groups. The amount earmarked is based on the number of students attending a particular school. Private schools, including religious ones, do not pay gross revenue tax but pay a flat port clearance fee of \$3 for 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. These applicants must provide police and medical clearances and include letters from the assigning church in the sending foreign country and the local accepting church 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 18, the government invited religious leaders and members of all faiths and denominations to the capital for a program of prayer and song during the National Day of Prayer. According to the government, the program “welcomes all expressions of religion, no matter what a person’s choosing is and without

reservation or reproach.” Other activities to promote religious freedom included a Christmas celebration in Koror at which various churches performed and which featured Christian prayers of various denominations. Men and women leaders from traditional religious groups continued to convene for cultural and government events across 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 and Engagement**

In March, the Ambassador met with a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and discussed the status of religious freedom in the country. The Ambassador engaged frequently with religious leaders at a number of events during the course of the year.