

## **FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

### **Executive Summary**

The constitution states no law may be passed respecting the establishment of a state religion or impairing the free exercise of religion. The government may provide assistance to religiously affiliated schools for nonreligious purposes. Observers stated Kosrae State government leaders expressed differing opinions regarding tolerance and respect for smaller religious groups. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae State reported it did not receive police responses to physical threats to individuals and incidents of vandalism and stated the government did not extend public services to their community.

Some Christians continued their advocacy of amending the constitution to prohibit the presence of non-Christian religious groups. The Inter-Denominational Council in Pohnpei continued to address social problems and promote official cooperation among most Christian groups. Other groups, including members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah's Witnesses, stated the council's charter was not inclusive. Ahmadi Muslims continued to report incidents of vandalism targeting their religious centers and homes.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and tolerance with national and state governments. The embassy also had discussions with religious leaders and sponsored educational events to promote religious tolerance.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 104,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to government statistics, approximately 99 percent of the population identifies as Christian. Several Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church are present in every state. According to government statistics, 55 percent of long-term residents are Roman Catholic and 42 percent are Protestant. The United Church of Christ is the main Protestant denomination. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of Jesus Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups exist in small numbers, including approximately 45 Ahmadi Muslims, with a variable expatriate population of Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and other Muslims.

According to a 2014 Pew Research Center report, 2.7 percent of the population follows folk religions.

In Kosrae State, 90 percent of the population is Protestant, with the Congregational Church the most prominent. In Pohnpei State, the population is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics – more Protestants live on the western side, while more Catholics live on the eastern side. In Chuuk State, an estimated 60 percent is Catholic and 40 percent is Protestant. In Yap State, an estimated 80 percent of the population is Catholic and the remainder is Protestant. Religious affiliation often follows clan lines.

The majority of foreign workers are Filipino Catholics, who number more than 1,000.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion, although the government may fund nonreligious activities in religiously affiliated schools. The constitution provides for the free exercise of religion. It also provides that the traditions of the country may be protected by statute and, if such statute is challenged as violating rights provided in the constitution, protection of the tradition “shall be considered a compelling social purpose warranting such governmental action.”

There are no registration requirements for a group to operate as a religious entity.

While there is no religious education in public schools, private schools teach religion in addition to the curriculum established by the Department of Education.

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

### **Government Practices**

Kosrae State government leaders expressed differing opinions regarding tolerance and respect for smaller religious groups.

An Ahmadi Muslim reported police did not respond to threats of physical assault on individuals and actual incidents of vandalizing graffiti, particularly in the predominantly Protestant Kosrae State.

The government said the Islamic Center had access to water, electricity, and ample space for lodging, prayer and outdoor activities.

The government continued to provide grants to private, church-affiliated schools. It continued to state it made no distinction between public and private schools in its grants programs.

The Ahmadi imam reported the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae did not receive assistance from the Kosraen government to help it establish a mosque in the state.

National and state government events routinely opened and closed with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic clergy member, and often one from each group.

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

Some Christians on social media continued to advocate amending the constitution to prohibit the presence of non-Christian religious groups, and some pastors opposed allowing non-Christians to practice openly. Other commentators said freedom of religion is a basic human right. Government leaders neither publicly supported nor opposed these positions.

The council of the United Church of Pohnpei said it promoted unity among religious groups in Pohnpei by addressing social problems and promoting cooperation among religious communities. The council also said it meets annually with other religious groups in the country to promote unity and cooperation.

Ahmadis said they continued outreach through youth after-school sports and homework programs, in addition to adult evening faith programs.

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

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom and held regular meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs, senior cabinet officials, and state government

officials. Embassy officials stressed the primacy of the constitution over local laws or practices that potentially privilege one religious group over others.

In Yap State, embassy officials and a U.S. Navy chaplain met with representatives from the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist School and Church, the International Christian School and Church of God, and the Pentecostalian Academy and Baptist Church, and the Roman Catholic School and Church. Discussion topics included beliefs and practices in the local context, religious tolerance, and mutual respect.

Embassy officials met with local Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant leaders to discuss religious tolerance.