



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [2010 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) » [East Asia and Pacific](#) » [Tuvalu](#)

Tuvalu

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. Some traditional island councils interfered with the free practice of religion on some islands.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, particularly on the northern island of Nanumanga.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago of nine island groups with a total area of 10 square miles and a population of 10,860. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, has the largest number of followers. Government estimates of religious affiliation as a percentage of the population include the Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 3 percent; Baha'i Faith, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Roman Catholic, 1 percent. There are also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The Tuvalu Brethren Church, a new charismatic Protestant group, claims to have as many as 300 adherents.

All nine island groups have traditional chiefs, all of whom are members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religious groups or denominations are found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of a relatively large number of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Although the Church of Tuvalu is by law the state church, this status has few ramifications other than to afford it "the privilege of performing special services on major national events." The constitution provides for separation of church and state. The preamble of the constitution states the country is "an independent State based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition." Government ceremonies at the national level, such as the opening of parliament and at the island-council level, often include Christian prayers and clergy. By law any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Gospel Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

In September 2009 the Tuvalu Court of Appeal met to hear an appeal by the Tuvalu Brethren Church against a 2005 High Court judgment upholding the right of traditional island elder councils to restrict the constitutional right to freedom of religion in cases where they contended it could threaten traditional mores and practices. In its decision the court set aside the High Court ruling and declared unconstitutional the resolution of the Nanumanga Island council banning the Brethren Church. The Brethren case is the first appeal of a High Court decision in the country's history as an independent nation, and the Court of Appeal had never previously been constituted since independence.

Missionaries practiced without restriction on some islands, but on other islands traditional island elder councils have issued formal and informal bans on proselytizing by representatives of religious groups that are not already established there.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The Brethren Church and other groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, were perceived as outside the mainstream on some outer islands, particularly on Nanumanga Island. In some cases, local traditional leaders discouraged groups from proselytizing or holding meetings, claiming that "new" religious groups may be disruptive to traditional societal structures.

Social discrimination, including acts and threats of violence, occurred against Brethren Church members on Nanumanga. Such treatment prompted some Brethren Church members to leave Nanumanga for Funafuti.

The Church of Tuvalu exerts considerable influence in the social and political life of the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the government. Representatives of the U.S. embassy in Fiji visited the country and discussed human rights with the government. Embassy officials also discussed with nongovernmental organizations and the Tuvalu People's Lawyer the status of legal cases surrounding the Brethren Church.

The C
Affair
the U
Exter
consi
polici

[Back to Top](#)