

# **PALAU 2021 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 “welcome[d] all expressions of religion...without reservation or reproach.”

Activities to promote religious freedom included a Christmas celebration in Koror featuring Christian songs and prayers offered by various denominations. Leaders from traditional religious groups continued to convene for cultural and government events across the country at times during the year.

On July 2, the U.S. Ambassador conducted a discussion with guests from church-affiliated high schools. Visiting U.S. forces in the country for exercises and other civil engagements regularly deployed with military chaplains, who engaged with religious communities. Between June and October, a visiting chaplain from the U.S. Army contacted the Evangelical Church and discussed the effect of drugs and alcohol abuse on families and the community. A U.S. Navy chaplain visited for several months as part of exercise “Koa Moana” and met with the Seventh-day Adventist congregation and other faith groups and participated in a number of public discussions on topics that included youth suicide in the country.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 22,000 (midyear 2021). 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); Modekngei, 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 Catholics, with the remainder holding diverse religious beliefs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign workers of different religious backgrounds departed the country, affecting its religious demography during the year.

## **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.

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, a group 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 sign a charter for the NGO.

The law empowers the President to proclaim and designate any day in January of each 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 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 must obtain permits from the division of immigration, which is under the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection of the Ministry of Finance; there are no application fees. Applicants must provide police and medical clearances, and applications must include letters from the assigning church in the sending foreign country and the local accepting church. 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, outgoing President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. invited religious leaders and members of all faiths and denominations, including newly elected national leaders, to the capital for a program of prayer and song during the National Day of Prayer. According to the government, the program “welcome[d] all expressions of religion, no matter what a person’s choosing is and without reservation or reproach.”

The government provided \$947,000 to parochial schools that was equitably distributed based on the number of students attending a school, to be used for nonreligious purposes.

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

Activities to promote religious freedom included a Christmas celebration in Koror at which various churches performed, featuring Christian songs and prayers offered by various denominations. Men and women leaders from traditional religious groups continued to convene for cultural and government events across the country at various times during the year.

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

On July 2, at an event in celebration of U.S. Independence Day, the Ambassador conducted a discussion with guests from church-affiliated high schools. Visiting U.S. military forces entering the country for exercises and various civil engagements regularly deployed with military chaplains, who engaged with religious communities. Between June and October, a visiting U.S. Army chaplain contacted leaders and members in the Evangelical Church and discussed the effects of drugs and alcohol abuse on families and the community. A U.S. Navy chaplain visiting for several months as part of the military exercise “Koa Moana” met with the Seventh-day Adventist congregation and other faith groups and participated in a number of public discussions on topics that included youth suicide in the country.