

THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy:

Report on Religious Freedom in the Federated States of Micronesia

Executive Summary

(1) The Federated States of Micronesia became an independent and sovereign country in 1979. The Constitution provides that all citizens have the right to worship any religion they choose. Although the vast majority of the population is Christian, there is no state religion. There are no apparent signs of religious discrimination or persecution in Micronesia.

THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy

(2) Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy is an international, inter-religious non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring freedom of religion as the foundation for security, stability, and democracy. THE INSTITUTE works globally to promote fundamental rights, and religious freedom in particular, with government policy-makers, religious leaders, business executives, academics, non-governmental organizations and others. THE INSTITUTE encourages and assists in the effective and cooperative advancement of religious freedom throughout the world.

History and Demographics of Freedom in Micronesia

(3) Just east of the Philippines, the Federated States of Micronesia consists of 607 of the islands that make up the archipelago of the Caroline Islands. On May 10, 1979, the districts of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae formed their own constitutional government, and declared themselves independent from the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to form the Federated States of Micronesia. On November 3, 1986, the Federated States of Micronesia became fully independent under a Compact of Free Association with the United States. The Compact allows Micronesia to govern itself, but the United States is responsible for the country's protection.

(4) In Micronesia, 50% of the population is Roman Catholic, 47% is Protestant, and the remaining 3% is affiliated with other minority religious groups or are not affiliated with any religious group. The demographics break down even further by island. An overwhelming majority of the population (95%) on Kosrae is Protestant, while on Chuuk and Yap 60% of the population is Catholic and 40% is Protestant. On Pohnpei, the population is evenly split. Churches, in Micronesia, are usually highly attended and supported by their communities. Other religious organizations with small followings on the islands include the Baha'i, Buddhist, and Islamic faith traditions.

Legal Status

(5) The Federated States of Micronesia's 1979 Constitution states, "No law may be passed respecting an establishment of religion or impairing the free exercise of religion, except that assistance may be provided to parochial schools for non-religious purposes." The constitution also guarantees many other fundamental human rights such as freedom of life, liberty, property, expression, assembly. There are no laws stopping foreign missionary groups from operating on the islands.

(6) There is no official state religion and the Bill of Rights forbids one from being declared.

Specific Instances of Religious Discrimination

(7) There were no reported governmental abuses of religious freedom during the reporting period in Micronesia. The United States State Department reported, "There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was no notable tension between the two largest religious groups, Protestants and Catholics, and an Inter-Denominational Council exists to address social problems and promote official cooperation between the two."

US Foreign Policy

(8) Under the Compact of Free Association, the United States is responsible for the security of the Federated States of Micronesia. In addition, Micronesians can work, live, and study in the United States without a visa, and vice versa. Micronesians are also able to enlist in the United States Armed Forces and Service Academies. The United States is also the Federated States of Micronesia's largest trade partner, and primary source of revenue.

(9) The State Department reported that, "The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the government [of Micronesia] in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights."

Conclusion

(10) The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia guarantees the freedom of religion to its citizens. In the past year, it seems as though the government of Micronesia has lived up to its Constitution because there were no reports of religious discrimination or persecution. The United States, however, continues to discuss the idea of religious freedom with Micronesia as part of their policy to promote human rights.