

MAURITIUS

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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 has an area of 718 square miles and a population of 1.3 million. According to the 2000 census, 48 percent of the population is Hindu, 24 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 9 percent belongs to other Christian denominations. The remaining 2 percent of the population includes Buddhists, animists, and others. Roman Catholics make up 73 percent of the Christian population, while the remaining 27 percent are members of the following groups: Seventh-day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Church of England, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Sunnis account for more than 90 percent of Muslims; a minority are Shia.

On the main island, the northern portion is primarily Hindu, while the central area is mainly Catholic. There are large populations of Muslims and Catholics in the cities of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. The island of Rodrigues is 92 percent Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent are primarily Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

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Parliamentary decree recognizes religious organizations that were present prior to independence, including the Catholic Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims. These groups receive an annual lump sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based on their number of adherents as determined by the census. The registrar of associations registers new religious organizations, which must have a minimum of seven members, and the Ministry of Finance grants them tax-exempt privileges. The government reportedly did not refuse registration to any group.

The government allowed foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restricted their presence or limited proselytizing activities, religious groups must obtain both a resident and a work permit for each missionary. The prime minister's office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. The government granted residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extension granted.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Thaipooam Cavadee, Maha Shivaratree, Ougadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid al-Fitr, Divali, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, mainly Christians and Muslims, alleged that interference

in the government promotion system prevented them from reaching higher-level positions in the civil service. More generally, non-Hindus often claimed underrepresentation in government.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Action Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During the year the court postponed the hearing until 2011 of a Hindu man charged with disturbing a religious gathering. On March 14, in a predominantly Hindu village, approximately 15 Hindu men vandalized property, set fire to a nearby sugarcane field, and shouted "go home, go home" to participants in a three-day celebration organized by the Pentecostal group Light Ministries International; several participants were injured. Police arrested four men in connection with the incident; three were not formally charged, but one of the four was charged with disturbing a religious gathering and fined 3,000 Mauritian rupees (\$100).

In September Light Ministries International organized a religious celebration in a predominantly Creole area of Mauritius. A Voice of Hindu banner was placed on top of the Pentecostal banner that advertised the event. The National Pentecostal Council notified the offices of the prime minister and the president of the situation, but neither office responded officially or took action.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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