



Micronesia

Stable / Unchanged —



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **94.7%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **2.8%**
- Others : **2.5%**

105.000

702 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Federal States of Micronesia are found in the eastern Caroline Islands, a widely scattered archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. The eastern four island groups are about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to Indonesia.

Micronesia's constitution (Article 4 – Declaration of Rights), excludes the possibility of a state religion being established. The same article also expressly forbids any law which restricts religious freedom.^[1]

Religious demography figures vary. According to 2010 estimates, 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. A further 41.1 percent is Protestant, the majority belonging to the Congregational Church (38.5 percent)^[2] There are small numbers of Baha'is, Ahmadi Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews. In Yap State, Catholics make up approximately 80 percent of the population. The Congregational Church is prominent in Kosrae State where it is estimated that 90 percent of the population is Protestant. Elsewhere, the demographics are more evenly balanced between Catholics and Protestants.

There are no indications that the central government pursues policies or allows practices at odds with constitutional safeguards regarding religious freedom. Religious groups are not required to register with the state. Public schools do not provide religious education but private schools may teach religion in addition to the government-approved curriculum. The government may fund non-religious activities in parochial schools. Private church schools receive state grants. Official functions and events often begin with a Christian prayer led by a Catholic or a Protestant minister. An inter-denominational council exists in Pohnpei to address social problems and promote official co-operation between Protestants and Catholics.^[3] The US State Department religious freedom 2016 report notes that other groups, including Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, view the council's charter as not inclusive.^[4]

Incidents

The establishment of an Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae State in 2011 was met with some hostility. In 2014, around 1,000 people signed a petition calling for Islam to be banned from Kosrae.^[5] A news report details incidents of intolerance in Kosrae State towards the Muslim community. Proposals were introduced at a municipal level aimed at introducing ordinances banning Islam or alternatively imposing taxes on Muslims.^[6] In response, in January 2016 the Department of Justice made a public statement that any actions which violated the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion would be taken seriously on grounds that they could give rise to criminal liability.^[7]

The same report also details sporadic acts of hostility towards Muslims, including rocks thrown at their vehicles, vandalism of property and one taxi firm refusing its services to Muslims.^[8] In March 2017, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community held an Annual Conference of Peace which was attended by government officials, as well as representatives of the Congregational Church, the Catholic Church, the Seventh Day Adventists and other Christian denominations.^[9] In October 2017, an event aimed at removing misconceptions about Ahmadiyya Islam and promoting its peaceful understanding of Islam was held in Pohnpei and was attended by the US ambassador.^[10]

Prospects for freedom of religion

Both the authorities and representatives of the main religious communities, as well as individuals within each community, have sent clear signals that they are committed to religious co-existence and constitutional guarantees regarding freedom of religion. Despite concerns about sporadic acts of discrimination and hostility, there is no reason to think that tensions will significantly undermine these legal obligations and existing social relations.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Micronesia (Federated States of)'s Constitution of 1978 with Amendments through 1990, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Micronesia_1990.pdf?lang=en), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Micronesia_1990.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[2] 'Federated States of Micronesia', CIA World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_fm.html, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Federated States of Micronesia', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[4] <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> Section III/Section III.Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016

[5] 'Muslims held first annual conference of peace in Kosrae', Kaselehlie Press, 20th March 2017, http://www.kpress.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=567:muslims-held-first-annual-conference-of-peace-in-kosrae&catid=8&Itemid=103, (accessed 17 February 2018).

[6] 'Kosrae's Malem Municipal Council introduces Ordinance to ban religious freedom within its borders', Kaselehlie Press, 7th March 2016, http://www.kpress.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=archive&year=2017&month=3&Itemid=101, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[7]'Muslims held first annual conference ...', op. cit.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ahmadiyya Muslim Community FSM, 'Meet a Muslim event held in Pohnpei', Kaselelie Press, 23rd October 2017).
http://www.kpress.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=780:meet-a-muslim-event-held-in-pohnpei&catid=8&Itemid=103 (accessed 17th February 2018)