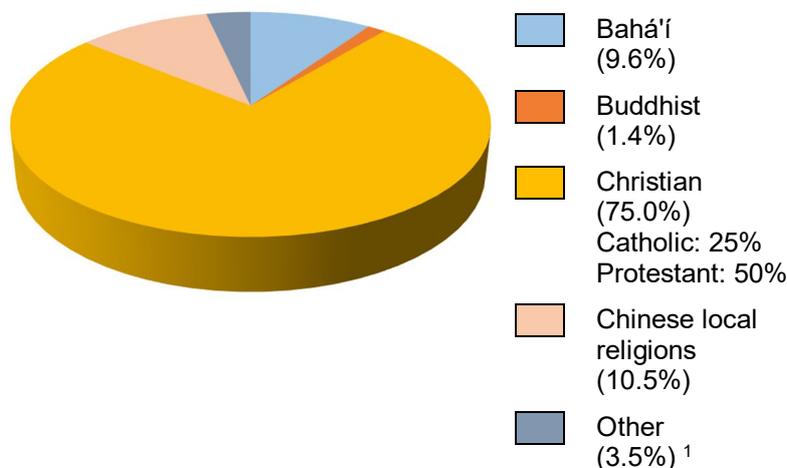
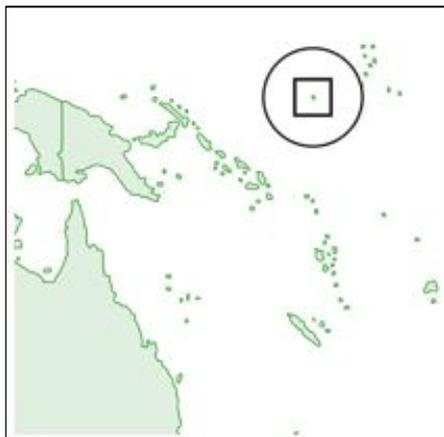


NAURU



| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Area: 21 km ² | Population: 10,000 | Political system: Democracy | Major Language(s): Nauruan, English |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|

Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

Formerly named Pleasant Island by its first European visitors, the world's smallest republic achieved independence in 1968. A German colony in the late nineteenth century, it was administered by Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom under a League of Nations mandate following the First World War.

Despite Nauru's alleged human rights abuses, there have been no reports of oppression of religious freedom. While the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association, it also declares that such freedoms may be restricted by any law "which is reasonably required ... in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health".² There is no state religion but, in common with most inhabitants of the island, the majority of government officials are members of the Nauru Protestant Church. It was noted by the US State Department that there were no reports of general societal discrimination against religious groups.³

The predominant religion practised on the island is Christianity and missionaries of many different Christian denominations are present and active in the country. Although relationships between religious groups are amicable, social tensions have been on the rise. Issues with the country's phosphate mining industry have caused economic problems resulting in a decline in income and leaving Nauru dependent on aid.

Nauru's policies on religious freedom have mainly affected faith groups including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses. Many foreign workers converted to the two religious groups after meeting workers of different faiths within the phosphate industry. Some resistance by the Nauru Protestant Church to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses has emerged as some Christians fear that proselytisation by these groups would create tensions among locals.

Those who have converted to other Christian denominations are now allowed to hold religious services in their company-owned housing. Such worship was prohibited in the past but there is no

evidence to suggest restrictions continue. The government also asked both groups to register their churches under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance or else they would be prevented from building churches or holding services.

Incidents

In more recent years, Nauru has been involved in controversy in relation to the Australian-run asylum-seeker detention camp on the island. Those responsible for the camp have been accused of human rights abuse and overcrowding. Australia has sent all asylum seekers to detention centres on Nauru and Papua New Guinea since 2013 and the camp is a major employer of citizens. Detainees and human rights activists have protested against the treatment and living conditions of the asylum seekers. In July 2013, a riot took place at the centre in an unprecedented incident. The following year, the government of Nauru admitted that an increase in fees for journalist visas was in response to negative reporting by foreign correspondents. As a result, by November 2014, no international agencies had applied for a visa.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

There has been a marked improvement in religious freedom over recent years. The government lifted previous restrictions on the practice of missionary work by the Jehovah's Witnesses in 2008, whose members had previously been denied entry visas. Before this amendment in policy, representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were also refused permission to enter the country.⁴

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_158_2.asp

² https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nauru_1968

³ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁴ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2008/108417.htm>