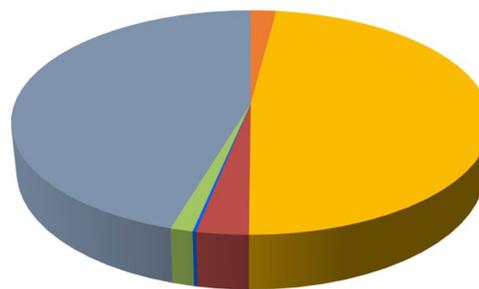
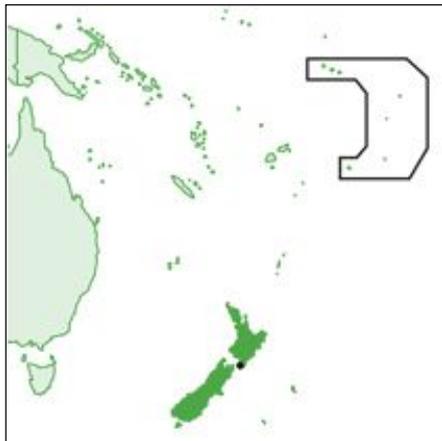


NEW ZEALAND



- Buddhist (2.0%)
- Christian (48.1%)
Catholic: 12.6%
Protestant: 22.5%
Other: 13%
- Hindu (3.0%)
- Jewish (0.2%)
- Muslim (1.3%)
- Other (45.4%)¹

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Area: 267, 700 km ² | Population²: 4.6 million | Political system: Democracy ³ | Major Language(s): Maori, English ⁴ |
|--|---|--|--|

Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

According to the New Zealand Bill of Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, including the right to adopt and to hold opinions without interference.”⁵ Religious expression is unrestricted: “Every person has the right to manifest that person’s religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching, either individually or in community with others, and either in public or in private”⁶, provided that religious practices do not breach the peace.⁷

While there is no official state religion, a Christian prayer is recited at the opening of every parliamentary session. The law provides that teaching within public primary schools “shall be entirely of a secular character.” However, under certain circumstances, it permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools, however, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory.⁸

Discrimination on the basis of religion or ethical belief (the lack of religious belief) is prohibited.⁹ Complaints of unlawful discrimination, including on the basis of religious beliefs, may be filed with the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC). Conduct prohibited by the Human Rights Act may also be prosecuted under other laws.¹⁰

The HRC continued to implement its 2007 Statement on Religious Diversity, which “emphasises that the state seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law, and that New Zealand has no official or established religion. It encourages education about our diverse religious and spiritual traditions, respectful dialogue, and positive relationships between government and faith communities.”¹¹

In its Annual Report for 2015 (for the period ending June 30, 2015), the HRC reported 49 unlawful discrimination enquiries and complaints related to religious belief.¹² In the previous year, ending June 30 2014, the HRC received 69 enquiries and complaints on the grounds of religious belief.¹³

The Bill of Rights provides for the protection of religious minorities: “A person who belongs to an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority in New Zealand shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of that minority, to enjoy the culture, to profess and practice the religion, or to use the language, of that minority.”¹⁴

Incidents

In November 2014, the *New Zealand Herald* reported: “The Race Relations Commission said there had been attacks on members of other religious groups, and events overseas were possibly the trigger for a rise in hate crimes.”¹⁵ In November 2014, a four-year-old boy wearing a yarmulke on his way home from school was slapped on the head by a man, in what has been described as an anti-Semitic hate crime.¹⁶

In December 2014, *Radio New Zealand* reported that Muslim New Zealanders were facing societal intolerance including incidents of outbursts directed at women and children wearing hijabs or headscarves.¹⁷

In its 2015 Annual Report, the HRC wrote: “Terrorist activities overseas and subsequent anti-terrorist and surveillance measures proposed by the Government raised concerns about marginalisation and targeting of local Muslim communities. The Prime Minister agreed to meet with the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand to discuss the issue.”¹⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that, while there were no reports of governmental restrictions on religious freedom, there may be a risk of increased societal intolerance toward minority religions. This takes account of the increase in Muslims and related faith groups as well as other minority religions.

¹ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

² http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/estimates_and_projections/NationalPopulationEstimates_HOTPAAt30Jun15.aspx

³ Parliamentary democracy and Commonwealth realm , <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/nz.html>

⁴ English 89.8% (de facto official), Maori 3.5% (de jure official), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/nz.html>

⁵ New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, Section 13

⁶ New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, Section 15

⁷ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁸ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁹ New Zealand Human Rights Act 1993, Sections 21(c) and (d)

¹⁰ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

¹¹ http://27-Aug-2009_09-44-53_Religious_Diversity_09_Web.pdf

¹² https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/5414/4893/3995/924898ED-8C74-428A-9ACD-0196CC2125E5HRC_Annual_Report_2015.pdf

¹³ <https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/5214/2352/3805/AnnualReport2014-webpdf.pdf>

¹⁴ New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, Section 20

¹⁵ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11363241

¹⁶ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11363010

¹⁷ <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/260967/muslims-facing-discrimination-in-nz>

¹⁸ https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/5414/4893/3995/924898ED-8C74-428A-9ACD-0196CC2125E5HRC_Annual_Report_2015.pdf