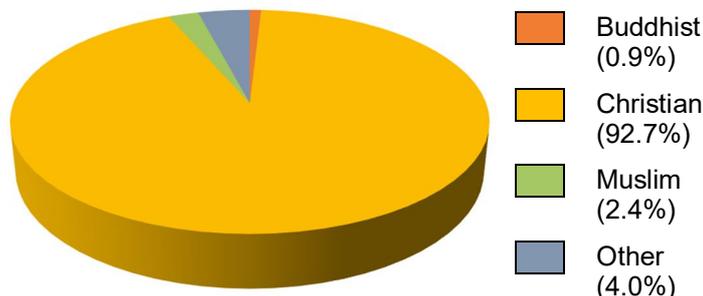
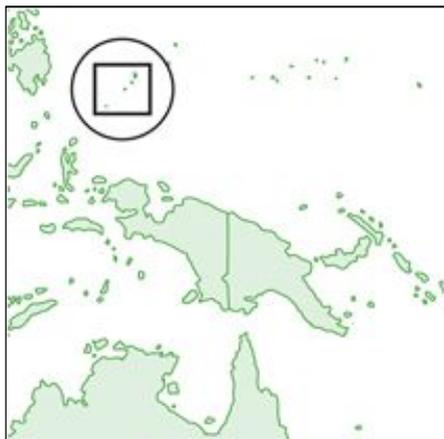


PALAU



Area: 466 km ²	Population: 17,948	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Palauan, English, Japanese, Sonsorolese, Tobian
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The Republic of Palau is spread across 250 islands, forming the western chain of the Caroline Islands in the western Micronesia in the Pacific Ocean. The majority of the nation's 21,000 population is situated in Koror. The capital Ngerulmud is located on the nearby island of Babeldaob in Melekeok State. Once a part of the Spanish East Indies, the islands became part of the American-governed Trust Territory along with other islands in the Pacific after US troops liberated Palau from the Japanese during the Second World War. The country gained full sovereignty in 1994 and has a Compact of Free Association with the US, which looks after its defence and subsidises social services.

Christianity is practised by 75 percent of the population and the government recognises Christmas as a national holiday despite not sponsoring a particular religious group. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion of the 19 Christian denominations present in the islands and most national events are conducted with a prayer to open and close the ceremonies. Christianity has been dominant since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early 19th century. During the Japanese occupation, Christian missions were heavily subsidised and following Japan's defeat, the remaining forces converted from their native Buddhism to Christianity. There is also active participation in Easter and Christmas services. As well as Christians, a small percentage of Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and members of the Modekngai faith also worship in the country.

The Modekngai faith is unique to the country and is professed by approximately 8.8 percent of the inhabitants. Followers recognise one God, accepting Jesus Christ while also following ancient Palauan goddesses in a mix of Christianity and Palauan customs. During the First World War, the religion was politically important as a non-violent opposition to the forces of the Japanese Empire.

The constitution provides for religious freedom and these rights are respected in practice. The government discusses religious freedom as part of its policy to promote human rights. The government also provides financial aid for Church-run schools. However religious groups must register as non-profit organisations in order for the authorities to regulate the establishment of such groups but these groups are not denied the freedom to register. By registering as non-profit organisations, Churches and missions are exempt from tax.¹ Foreign missionaries are also

required to obtain a permit from the immigration office, however there were no reports in the period covered that the government denied any permits to individuals.

Incidents

According to research conducted, during the period under review there were no reports of violence relating to religious differences.²

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

In recent years, the small number of the Muslims has increased following the arrival of Turkic-speaking Uyghurs Muslims of China as a temporary measure by the US after being released from prison in Guantanamo. Reports have suggested that the islands' Muslim inhabitants have found it difficult to find employment. In July 2015, it was reported that all six of the Muslim Uyghurs who were temporarily relocated to the island back in 2009 had left.³ Palau President Remengesau made the announcement during his press conference held at his office in Meyuns. It had been reported by *Associated Press* that the Uyghur community had faced economic hardship due to cuts in government stipends. There are an estimated 500 Bengali Muslims remaining in Palau, which has two mosques.

¹ <http://www.ncbuy.com/reference/country/backgrounds.html?code=ps&sec=religiousfree>

² <http://www.muslimpopulation.com/Oceania/Palau/ip.php>

³ <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/2015/July/07-14-14.htm>