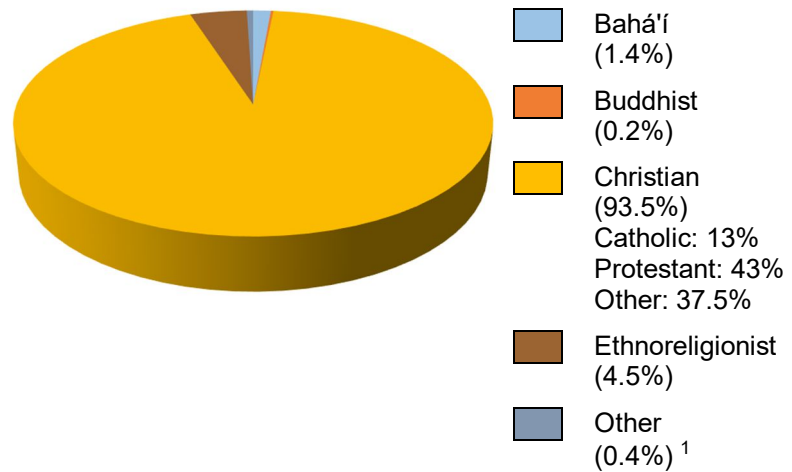
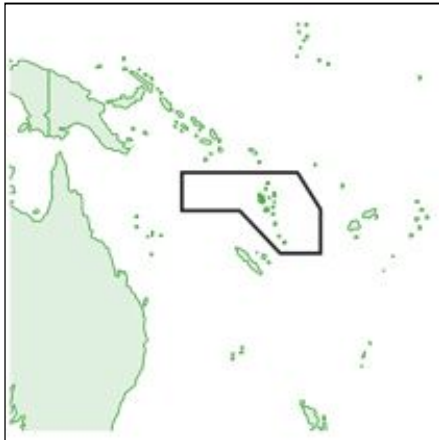


VANUATU



Area: 12,189 km ²	Population: 246,000	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): English, French, Bislama
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The Republic of Vanuatu in the South Pacific Ocean is an archipelago of volcanic origin. The island nation was first inhabited by Melanesian people until it was claimed by Spain in 1606. In 1906, an agreement was made between France and Britain to jointly manage the islands as the New Hebrides through a British–French Condominium. Vanuatu eventually achieved independence in 1980.

Of the estimated 267,000 total population, it was reported that approximately 82 percent are Christians – Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Seventh-day Adventists. There is a comparatively small number of Jewish while the remaining population consists of other religious groups including Baha'is and Muslims.

Vanuatu's constitution provides for the freedom of religious practice and freedom of belief. Though Christian values are mentioned in the preface to the constitution, there is no state religion. The law requires religious groups to register their organisation or face a fine; however the government does not enforce this. There were no reports of significant actions affecting religious freedom.

Formed as an umbrella organisation by the three largest church groups, the National Christian Council is supported by the government. Minority religious groups have been excluded and so do not receive government support. The government also interacts with religious organisations through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and provides grants to church-run schools, paying the salaries of teachers in schools that have existed since independence in 1980. Religious education conducted by representatives of churches in the council are given time each week to give lessons using their own material. The standard curriculum requires schools to provide students in years seven to 12 with one hour of religious instruction per week but parents have the right to remove their children from such classes if they wish. The government finances Christian schools only, however all faiths may give religious education in schools run by them.

Traditional Melanesian communities in more rural areas of Vanuatu operate a more communal decision-making process. Together, the chief and the community decide if new denominations or independent churches should be established. Significant changes require an agreement to be met within the community after peaceful negotiation. Religious representation at national events is organised by the Vanuatu Christian Council.

Incidents

In April 2013, Prime Minister Moana Carcasses was criticised after a Radio New Zealand International report stated his government would start paying an annual 10 % tithe to the Vanuatu Christian Council from the national budget, which could amount to as much as US\$ 21 million.² However, after a public backlash, the Prime Minister reportedly said he felt it was the duty of a worker to pay a ten percent tithe to God and that the government did not have the money to pay its tithe. Vice chairman of Vanuatu's Christian Council, Bishop John Bosco, then clarified that the government would work with the Council to find ways to help the country's churches.³

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

According to the Freedom House report, it was stated that overall the government generally respected freedom of religion in the predominantly Christian country.

¹http://thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_237_1.asp

² <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/211702/vanuatu-pm-promises-ten-percent-of-national-budget-annually-to-churches>

³ <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/2013/April/04-26-04.htm>