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 - [News](#)
 - [Statistics and Operational Data](#)
 - [Research](#)
 - [Website](#)
- [Laws](#)
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 - [1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
 - [1969 OAU Refugee Convention](#)
 - [Cartagena Declaration on Refugees](#)
 - [EU acquis](#)
 - [National Legislation](#)
 - [Statelessness / Nationality](#)
 - [1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)
 - [1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#)
 - [Nationality law](#)
- [Jurisprudence](#)
 - [Case Law](#)
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 - [Publisher](#)
 - [Topic](#)
 - [Categories](#)
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 - [Legal Information](#)
 - [Policy Documents](#)

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Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR) and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Officers from the U.S. consulate general in Hong Kong and Macau met with leaders of religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region, as well as with academics from the Catholic Church-affiliated University of Saint Joseph, to discuss religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 583,000 (July 2013 estimate). The Government Information Bureau of the Macau SAR reports that nearly 80 percent of the population practices Buddhism. There are approximately 29,390 Roman Catholics (of whom over half are foreign domestic workers and other expatriates residing in Macau) and more than 8,000 Protestants. Protestant denominations include Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches. There are also evangelical groups and independent local churches. Smaller religious groups include Bahais (estimated at 2,500 persons), Muslims (estimated at 400 persons), and a small number of Falun Gong practitioners (estimated at 50 persons).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The Basic Law states, "Macau residents shall have freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public." In addition, the Basic Law stipulates, "the government, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups or in the efforts of religious groups and their believers to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Special Administrative Region."

Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), safeguards religious freedom in the SAR. Religious groups coordinate their relations with co-religionists in the PRC through the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO). The CGLO also maintains dialogue with religious groups in the SAR.

The Basic Law's provisions are further delineated in a law that provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education.

The law allows religious groups to register directly with the Identification Bureau, which is required under the law to receive and process registrations. Applicants must supply name, identification card number, contact information, group name, and a copy of the group's charter to register. Registration is not required to conduct religious activities, and it does not automatically confer tax-exempt status or other advantages.

Religious groups can apply to media organizations and companies to use mass media (television, radio, etc.) to preach, and such applications generally are approved.

The law also stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church, which is in communion with the Vatican, recognizes the Pope as the head of the church. The Vatican appoints the bishop for the diocese.

Government Practices

The Macau government provides financial support, regardless of religious affiliation for the establishment of schools, childcare centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers run by religious groups.

Religious groups reported the CGLO supported their activities and exchanges with co-religionists in the PRC.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Relations among the various religious groups were good, and citizens generally were tolerant of the religious views and practices of others. Many religious groups, including Catholics, Buddhists, Protestants, and Bahais, provided extensive social services. Falun Gong members regularly set up informational sites in public venues.

Public ceremonies and dedications often included prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

The private University of Saint Joseph, (formerly the Macau Inter-University Institute) which is affiliated with the Catholic University of Portugal, offers a Christian studies course that includes Catholic seminary students from the Mainland.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Officers from the U.S. consulate general in Hong Kong and Macau met with leaders of religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region, as well as with academics from the University of Saint Joseph, to discuss religious freedom. Consulate general staff stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with top Macau SAR officials.

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