



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **57.0%**
- Agnostics : **32.9%**
- Buddhists : **3.0%**
- Hindus : **2.0%**
- Muslims : **1.6%**
- Atheists : **1.4%**
- Others : **2.1%**

4.565.000

268.107 Km²

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”^[1] 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”^[2] provided that religious practices do not breach the peace.^[3]

New Zealand law states that the curriculum in state primary schools “shall be entirely of a secular character”^[4] However, under certain circumstances, religious instruction may take place within primary and secondary schools^[5] Attendance for this instruction is not compulsory.

Discrimination on the basis of religion or lack of religious belief is prohibited^[6] Complaints of unlawful discrimination 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.^[7]

The HRC continues 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”^[8] In its Annual Report for the period ending 30th June 2017, the HRC reported 69 enquiries and complaints on the grounds of religious belief^[9]

Incidents

In November 2016, an Indian Christian's application for asylum was rejected despite his claim that he faced death threats from Hindu extremists in India. The man's lawyer said that the threats to his client's life were due to his efforts to convert Indians to Christianity but the High Court ruled that, although the situation for Christians in India had "deteriorated", the risk was low if he went back.^[10]

In November 2016, an Auckland imam was publicly criticised by government officials after making anti-Semitic comments in his speeches, including referring to the Jewish community as "the enemy of Muslims". The President of the Federation of Islamic Association New Zealand (FIANZ) said the imam's views were incorrect and that he had made a mistake.^[11]

An Australian anti-Semitic blogger was detained in New Zealand in October 2017 when he arrived in Auckland after his entry permission was revoked on "character grounds". He had previously been jailed for three years in Australia after a verbal racist attack targeting two Jewish men.^[12]

In July 2016 a Muslim woman was told by a jewellery store manager not to bother applying for a job at the shop if she refused to remove her hijab. After she complained of discrimination, the company apologised and offered the woman an interview. This was reportedly the second instance of discrimination against women wearing a hijab in nine months.^[13]

In September 2016, the Whanganui branch of the Right Wing Resistance distributed anti-Muslim pamphlets in mailboxes around the region. The pamphlets claimed that Muslims came to New Zealand pretending to be refugees but were actually intent on changing the "laws, culture and daily life to suit Muslims", and that "their main goal was to 'kill anyone' who doesn't believe in their God (Allah)".^[14] The president of the Multicultural Council of Rangitikei/Whanganui condemned the pamphlets.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. However, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions fuelled by anti-immigration sentiments in New Zealand.

Sources / Endnotes

[1] 'Section 13', New Zealand's Constitution of 1852 with Amendments through 2014, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/New_Zealand_2014.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 1st February 2018).

[2] 'Section 15', *Ibid.*

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'New Zealand', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 1st February 2018).

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] 'Section 19(1)', New Zealand's Constitution of 1852 with Amendments through 2014, *op. cit.* and 'Sections 21(1)(c) and (d)', Human Rights Act 1993, New Zealand Legislation – Parliamentary Counsel Office, <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0082/latest/DLM304475.html>, (accessed 1st February 2018).

[7] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[8] New Zealand Diversity Action Programme, Religious Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand, Human Rights Commission, <https://www.hrc.co.nz/your-rights/race-relations-and-diversity/religion/our-work/>, (accessed 1st February 2018).

[9] Ibid.

[10] 'Indian evangelist denied refugee status in New Zealand to be deported', Business Standard, 24th November 2016, http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/indian-evangelist-denied-refugee-status-in-new-zealand-to-be-deported-116112400755_1.html, (accessed 2nd February 2018).

[11] B. Bath, 'Auckland Imam demands apology after backlash from anti-Semitic speeches', 22nd November 2016, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/86716199/auckland-imam-demands-apology-after-backlash-from-antisemitic-speeches>, (accessed 2nd February 2018); S. Palmer and B. Marbeck, "'Hate Speech" Imam made a "mistake" – FIANZ', Newshub, 22nd November 2016, <http://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2016/11/hate-speech-imam-made-a-mistake—fianz.html>, (accessed 2nd February 2018).

[12] 'Anti-Semitic blogger detained for nearly six weeks', Radio New Zealand, 21st November 2018, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/344341/anti-semitic-blogger-detained-for-nearly-six-weeks>, (accessed 2nd February 2018).

[13] C. Miller, 'No scarf, job seeker told, but jeweller says it was an error', NZ Herald, 19th July 2016, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11676895, (accessed 2nd February 2018).

[14] J. Maslin, 'Anti-Muslim pamphlet upsets residents', NZ Herald, 9th September 2016, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11705325, (accessed 2nd February 2018).