

Report lauds Taiwan for Muslim rights

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Taiwan has made “significant” progress in improving rights for Muslims, the US Department of State said on Friday in its International Religious Freedom report for last year.

The report cited the Chinese-Muslim Association as saying: The “authorities were making significant progress in improving rights for Muslims,” such as by increasing the number of restaurants and hotels that cater to Muslims’ dietary requirements and establishing prayer rooms for them.

“The number of halal-certified restaurants and hotels increased from 120 to 160 during the year,” the report said. “Local authorities in Taoyuan, Taichung, [as well as] Yunlin, Chiayi and Yilan [counties] held Eid al-Fitr commemorations. Authorities built new prayer rooms at train stations, libraries and tourist destinations.”

The report mentioned remarks by Vice President Chen Chien-jen (陳建生) when he attended the canonization of Pope Paul VI and six other Catholic figures at St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican in October last year as an indication of Taiwan’s efforts in pushing for religious freedom.

“As a beacon of religious freedom and tolerance, Taiwan is committed to further strengthening ties with the Holy See via substantive cooperative initiatives spanning democracy, religious freedom and human rights,” the report quoted Chen as saying.

However, the report repeated the department’s concerns from last year that the Labor Standards Act (勞基法) does not allow a day off for migrant domestic workers and caregivers, many of whom are Muslims from Indonesia, limiting their ability to attend religious services.

The report mentioned an objection from the Chinese-Muslim Association against a move made by the Kaohsiung City Government to relocate remains from a Muslim cemetery in the city to develop the site into a park.

The association said that the relocation failed to follow Muslim tenets.

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The city government said it held two public hearings and communicated with the Muslim community in Kaohsiung, and the majority of Muslims in the area had agreed to the relocation, according to the State Department's report.

The city government said that it exhumed graves and moved the remains in accordance with Muslim tenets, and also sent a delegation to Malaysia to learn how to properly relocate Muslim cemeteries, according to the report.

The imam of the Kaohsiung Mosque also provided assistance for the relocation, the report quoted the city as saying.

The report also cited the Tibet Religious Foundation as saying that Tibetan Buddhist monks in Taiwan remained unable to obtain resident visas for religious work, despite the authorities typically granting visas to other religious practitioners for similar purposes.

"The monks had to fly to Thailand every two months to renew their visas," the report said. "The monks did not have passports and instead traveled using Indian Identity Certificates issued to Tibetans who reside in India, but do not have Indian citizenship, and reportedly were valid for travel to all countries."

The department said that the foundation reported harassment from the True Enlightenment Practitioners Association, a Taiwanese Buddhist organization that has received funds from China and propagated a message saying: "Tibetan Buddhism is not real Buddhism."

In November last year, a court in Taiwan ordered the association to publish an apology, but it had not done so by the end of the year.

The government has said that all libel cases involving the Tibet Religious Foundation are closed.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/06/23](#)