

## Cambodia Limits Christian Activities

"We will follow the directive; we have no purpose to do anything against the Cambodian government"

Cambodia's government issued a directive preventing Christians from promoting their religion in public places, or using money or other means to persuade people to convert, officials said Tuesday.

They can do any activity inside their institutions, but are not allowed to go door-to-door, said Sun Kim Hun, deputy minister of cult and religion.

He said the directive, dated June 26 but distributed Tuesday, follows similar proclamations in 1999 and 2003 and is a reminder to Christian groups not to break the law. The directive did not mention other religions.

-----

## Religious Demography in Cambodia

Cambodia has an area of 67,000 square miles, and a population of approximately 14.1 million. An estimated 93 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist. The Theravada Buddhist tradition is widespread and strong in all provinces, with an estimated 4,100 pagodas throughout the country. Since the vast majority of ethnic Khmer Cambodians are Buddhist, there is a close association between Buddhism, Khmer cultural traditions, and daily life. Adherence to Buddhism generally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism is practiced by approximately 150,000 followers and has 63 temples throughout the country.

There are approximately 500,000 to 700,000 Muslims (between 3.5 to 5 percent of the population), predominantly ethnic Cham, who generally are found in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in Kampot Province. Some organizations that work with or have contacts in the Cham Muslim population cite lower estimates for the number of Cham Muslims in the country. A nationwide census scheduled for 2008 should provide a more accurate estimate. There are four branches of Islam represented: the Malay-influenced Shafi'i branch, practiced by 88 percent of Cham Muslims; the Saudi-Kuwaiti-influenced Salafi (sometimes called "Wahhabi") branch, which claims six percent of the Muslim population although this number is increasing; the indigenous Iman-San branch, practiced by three percent; and the Kadiani branch, which also contributes three percent. There are 200 to 300 mosques of the four main branches and 200 to 300 small Surav mosques, which have congregations of up to 40 persons and do not have a min-bar from which Friday sermons are given. The small, but growing, Christian community constitutes approximately two percent of the population.

There are an estimated 100 Christian organizations or denominations that operate freely throughout the country. Other religious organizations with small followings include the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, each with an estimated 2,000 practicing members