

BARBADOS 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of religion, including the freedom to change religion, and prohibit discrimination based on religious belief. Rastafarians were concerned about access to public education. Muslims objected to a government policy that required women to remove the hijab for identification and passport photographs.

Rastafarians said they faced discrimination, specifically for their dreadlocks, but that attitudes regarding Rastafarianism were becoming more positive.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and engaged religious group leaders and civil society, including the leadership of the Muslim, Rastafarian, Anglican, and Catholic communities, on freedom of religious expression and discrimination.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 291,000 (July 2016). According to the 2010 census, the most recently available, approximately 76 percent of the population is Christian. The two largest groups are Anglicans (23.9 percent) and Pentecostals (19.5 percent), followed by Seventh-day Adventists (5.9 percent), Methodists (4.2 percent), Roman Catholics (3.8 percent), Wesleyans (3.4 percent), Nazarenes (3.2 percent), and the Church of God (2.4 percent). Religious groups with 2 percent or less of the population each include Baptists, Moravians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and other Christian groups. Approximately 20.6 percent of respondents did not identify a religious affiliation. Other religious groups, which together constitute less than 3 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais. The Barbados Muslim Association states there are 3,000 Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion, and prohibition of discrimination based on creed. A law criminalizing “blasphemous libel” is unenforced.

Religious groups are not required to register. If they wish to obtain duty free import privileges and tax benefits, however, they are required to register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office. To do so, a religious group must file the applicable form, with a resolution passed by the majority of its board of trustees expressly authorizing the application, and a related statutory declaration.

The public school curriculum includes religious “values education.” The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from other religious groups are also invited to speak to students. The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction. The government provides subsidies or financial assistance to some of these schools. As laid out in the constitution, no person attending any place of education is required to take part in religious instruction, ceremony, or observance without personal consent or (if under the age of 21) consent of the guardian.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Rastafarians continued to state their objection to the government’s enforcement of the prohibition on marijuana use, which they said was integral to their religious rituals. A Rastafarian activist said that police and immigration officials required Rastafarians to remove head coverings and gave extra scrutiny to Rastafarian women at checkpoints, which they said was a pretext for searching for marijuana.

A Rastafarian activist stated the requirements for vaccinations to enroll in public schools violated Rastafarian religious beliefs.

Representatives from the Barbados Muslim Association said they objected to a government policy requiring women to remove all head coverings for identification and passport photographs. The association continued to ask the government to change its practices to permit head coverings in identification photographs, including passports.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians stated they faced discrimination, but that they had not faced hostile actions or were refused services. They said discrimination took on the form of being equated with troublemakers. An activist said he felt public attitudes regarding Rastafarianism were becoming more positive, but not fast enough.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy raised general religious freedom issues with the government.

Embassy officials engaged religious group leaders and civil society, including the leadership of the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, on freedom of religious expression and discrimination. The Ambassador held meetings with representatives from the Barbados Muslim Association and met with the Catholic and Anglican bishops.