

# **BARBADOS 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of religion, including the freedom to change one's religion, and prohibit discrimination based on religious belief. Rastafarians continued to object to the prohibition of marijuana, stating marijuana was integral to their religious rituals. They also continued to oppose the government's vaccination requirement for all children attending school. Some Muslims said they continued to object to a government policy requiring women to remove the hijab for identification and passport photographs. They said they were working with the government to review those policies.

Rastafarians continued to report some social discrimination, specifically for their dreadlocks; however, they stated societal attitudes regarding Rastafarianism continued to improve.

U.S. embassy officials raised religious freedom and specific cases with government ministries and offices at all levels. Embassy officials also engaged civil society and religious groups, including the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, on religious expression and societal or governmental discrimination based on religion or belief.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 293,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to the most recent census of 2010, approximately 76 percent of the population is Christian, including Anglicans (23.9 percent of the total population), Pentecostals (19.5 percent), 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, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups, together constituting less than 3 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Approximately 20.6 percent of respondents do not identify a religious affiliation. 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 not enforced.

The government does not require religious groups to register. To obtain duty-free import privileges and tax benefits, however, the government requires religious groups to register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office. A religious group must file the relevant customs and tax forms, along with a resolution passed by the majority of its board of trustees expressly authorizing the application, plus the group’s related statutory declaration.

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 to help cover the cost of students who could not find space in a public school. The public school curriculum includes religious “values education” as part of the historic association of schools with Christian missionaries who founded many of the schools. At the primary school level, the focus is on Christianity from several denominations. At the secondary school level, all major religions are included. The constitution protects students from mandatory 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 again stated their objection to the government’s enforcement of the marijuana prohibition for any use, including for religious rituals.

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 met with all political parties to discuss the issue, and the new administration stated that it would review this practice. Some Rastafarians again stated that police and immigration officials often asked them to remove head coverings and gave extra scrutiny to Rastafarian women at checkpoints as pretexts to search for marijuana.

Rastafarians stated that the requirement for vaccinations for all children to enroll in public schools violated Rastafarian religious beliefs.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Some Rastafarians again reported societal discrimination. Rastafarian sources, however, also said they believed public opinion of their community was gradually improving.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. embassy officials raised freedom of religious expression and discrimination issues at all levels, including with the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and People Empowerment.

Embassy officials engaged leaders and members of civil society and religious groups, including the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, regarding the importance of religious expression and any concerns regarding societal or governmental discrimination based on religion or belief. The embassy used Facebook to promote messages on the importance of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity across the Eastern Caribbean.