

# JAMAICA

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Rastafarians alleged that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them, although there are signs of increasing acceptance. Rastafarians alleged that elements of their religion, such as wearing dreadlocks and smoking marijuana, presented serious barriers to their ability to find employment and achieve professional status in the official economy.

The U.S. government occasionally discussed religious freedom with the government and with civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

According to the most recent census (2001), religious affiliation as a proportion of the population is: Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pentecostal, 10 percent; Baptist, 7 percent; Anglican, 4 percent; Roman Catholic, 2 percent; United Church, 2 percent; Methodist, 2 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; Moravian, 1 percent; Brethren, 1 percent; unstated, 3 percent; and "other," 10 percent. The category "other" included 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha'is. The census reported 21 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Parliament may act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there is also at least one Jewish school and at least two schools run by the Islamic Council of Jamaica.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

### **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

A Rastafarian sect, the Church of Haile Selassie I, has sought religious incorporation for 14 years without success. The church's most recent hearing before a parliamentary joint select subcommittee was in February 2010. Some in parliament maintained the church should be denied incorporation because it uses marijuana, which is illegal, in religious services. The church, however, claimed this was not the case and that it used legal herbs.

Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them; however, it was not clear whether such complaints reflected discrimination on the basis of religious belief or were due to the group's alleged illegal use of marijuana as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

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

Rastafarians alleged that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them. With the exception of the concerns raised by Rastafarians, there were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on religious matters. Muslim and Jewish groups reported that society was very tolerant of diverse religious affiliation.

**Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. government engaged with and encouraged dialogue among the various religious groups, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Rastafarians, as part of its overall efforts to promote religious freedom by meeting with the leaders of various faiths.