

BARBADOS 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officials met with leaders of various faith groups and discussed religious freedoms issues throughout the year. None raised concerns regarding religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 287,700, according to a U.S. Government source. According to the 2000 census, more than 95 percent of the population is Christian. The most recent census indicates that the two largest groups are Anglicans (28 percent) and Pentecostals (18 percent), followed by Seventh-day Adventists (5 percent), Methodists (5 percent), and Roman Catholics (4 percent). There are small numbers of Baptists, Moravians, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The number of non-Christians is small. There are 4,000 Muslims, most of whom trace their ancestry to the Indian state of Gujarat. A few immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as approximately 200 native-born persons, constitute the rest of the growing Muslim community. There are three mosques and an Islamic center. Other religious groups include Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. While the legal code criminalizes blasphemous libel, this generally was not enforced.

Religious groups are required to register with the government to obtain duty-free import privileges or tax benefits.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as “values education.” The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from other religious groups also are invited to speak to students.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes. The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom, although Rastafarians protested that marijuana use, prohibited by law, was integral to their religious rituals.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

The head of the Barbados Worker’s Union publicly referred to a local employer as an “Egyptian Jew” and there was extensive local media coverage of his remarks. The union leader said no apology was required and that none would be made. This comment came after reports that local workers were being paid less than foreign workers in the employer’s jewelry store.

The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and respect among adherents of different Christian denominations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officials engaged regularly with religious group leaders and all sectors of civil society on the topic of religious freedom. This included meetings with leaders of

the Anglican Diocese, the Catholic Church, and the evangelical association. Embassy officials also had ongoing contact and meetings with the leadership of the Muslim association. No leaders raised concerns regarding religious freedom issues.