

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Embassy officers engaged in discussions about religious freedom with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the leader of the Christian Council.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to a U.S. government estimate, the population is 50,700. Christianity is the dominant religion. An estimated 50 percent of the population is Anglican and 25 percent is Roman Catholic. The remainder includes Methodists, Moravians, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Bahais. Evangelical Christian groups are growing in number.

Members of the St. Kitts Christian Council include the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Salvation Army. Members of the Evangelical Association include the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Wesleyan Church, and the Church of God in Christ. Seventh-day Adventists do not belong to either religious umbrella group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for registering religious groups.

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Religious groups are not required to register, but may do so if desired. Registration provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information to the groups.

There are two Catholic schools and a Seventh-day Adventist school. The government does not contribute financially to these schools. Public schools can conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns at the discretion of the principal, but there is no policy specifically addressing other religions.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Rastafarians complained about the government's prohibition of marijuana use, which they described as integral to their religious rituals. Members of the group stated they were being marginalized and were victims of religious intolerance. On August 17, the Nyabinghi Theocracy Order, a Rastafarian organization, held a march and rally in Basseterre, St. Kitts. The prime minister affirmed that the government would not legalize marijuana.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Rastafarians continued to complain of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officers discussed religious freedom with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the leader of the Christian Council.