

# **SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

U.S. embassy officers engaged in discussions about religious freedom with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the leader of the Christian Council.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 51,100 (July 2013 estimate). Christianity is the dominant religious group. 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 Holiness Church, and the Church of God.

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

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally 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.

Public schools can conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns at the discretion of the principal, but there is no policy specifically addressing other religions. Those who object are allowed to be exempt from such prayers and hymns.

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

### **Government Practices**

Rastafarians continued to state that they faced discrimination, including cases in which public school officials sent Rastafarian children home because of long hair and/or dreadlocks, unless a parent provided a note stating that they were Rastafarians. Further, some Rastafarians reported that public school officials denied Rastafarian children, who were not vaccinated for religious reasons, entry to schools. Consequently, some parents of Rastafarian children had to home school their children or pay for a more expensive private school. In addition, Rastafarians said they were sometimes required to remove hair wraps for identification photos in order to travel.

Rastafarians stated that the government prohibited their use of marijuana, which they described as integral to their religious rituals.

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

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Rastafarians stated they continued to face discrimination in employment, such as applying for a job at a hotel but not getting hired due to having dreadlocks.

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

U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom with MFA officials and with the leader of the Christian Council.