

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO 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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. embassy continued an outreach program to various religious groups, including the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO). Embassy officials continued work with Muslim civic groups and hosted an iftar that included representatives from the Muslim community. Embassy representatives took part in the official opening of the Hindu Diwali festival.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.2 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 21.6 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 26.2 percent Protestant (which the government lists as 12.0 percent Pentecostal or evangelical, 5.7 percent Anglican, 4.1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 2.5 percent Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.2 percent Baptist, and 0.7 percent Methodist), 18.2 percent Hindu, 5 percent Muslim, and 1.5 percent Jehovah's Witnesses. Traditional Caribbean religious groups with African roots include the Spiritual Baptists (sometimes called Shouter Baptists) representing 5.7 percent of the population and the Orisha at 0.9 percent. According to the census data, 2.2 percent listed no religious affiliation, 11.1 percent did not state a religious affiliation, and 7.5 percent listed their affiliation as "other," which includes a number of small Christian groups, as well as Bahais, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews.

At the national level, 35.4 percent of the total population is of East Indian descent, while those of African descent account for 34.2 percent. The ethnic and religious composition of each of the two islands, however, varies distinctly. On the island of Trinidad, those of African descent make up 32 percent of the population and are predominantly Christian, along with a small Muslim community concentrated in and around Port of Spain and the east-west corridor of northern Trinidad. Those of East Indian descent comprise 37 percent of the population and are mostly Hindu,

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with some Muslims, Presbyterians, and Catholics. The population of Tobago is 85 percent of African descent and predominantly Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. An anti-blasphemy law is not enforced.

To receive tax-exempt donations or gifts of land, or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit organizations. Otherwise, religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of whether they are registered. They may, for example, own land and hire employees, and are likewise liable for property taxes and government-mandated employee benefits.

The government subsidizes both nondenominational public schools and religiously affiliated public schools, including schools operated by Catholic, Hindu, and Islamic groups. The government permits religious instruction in nondenominational public schools, allocating time each week when any religious group with an adherent in the school may provide an instructor. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the religious groups represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. The law does not permit homeschooling.

The Ministry of the People and Social Development is responsible for relations with religious groups and administers annual financial grants to religious groups. It also issues recommendations on land use by such groups.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the basis of religion or that would incite religious hatred. Desecration of any place of worship is also prohibited. Judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

Missionaries must meet standard requirements for entry visas and must represent a registered religious group. They may not remain longer than three years per visit, but may re-enter after a year's absence.

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Government Practices

The government continued to limit the number of foreign missionaries to 35 per registered religious group at any given time. Some international religious groups or denominations reportedly maintained more than 35 total missionaries in the country if they were affiliated with more than one registered group, including nonprofit groups and charities.

The government financially supported activities of the IRO, an interfaith coordinating committee representing most major religious groups. The IRO president or a representative regularly delivers the invocation at government-sponsored events, including the opening of parliament and the annual court term.

Members of the government often participated in the ceremonies and holidays of various religious groups, regularly emphasizing religious tolerance and harmony, and government officials routinely spoke publicly against religious intolerance. The prime minister, for example, participated in religious holiday events during Ramadan, Diwali, Eid al-Fitr, Easter, and Corpus Christi, and issued corresponding public statements underscoring religious freedom as a deeply held national value.

The government provided financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious celebrations.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy conducted outreach to various religious groups. The Charge d'Affaires and embassy representatives met with leaders of various religious organizations, and visited a number of religious sites.

The embassy's outreach to the Muslim community included an iftar. Several Muslim leaders from government and civil society attended the event, during which the Charge d'Affaires and the president of the largest Muslim association delivered remarks highlighting the value of religious freedom and stated that the country was a model of religious diversity and tolerance.

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Embassy staff regularly met with Muslim religious and civil society leaders, and these discussions included issues related to religious tolerance. Embassy staff also continued working with religious groups such as Generation Change, which comprises young Muslim leaders who are connecting with their peers in different parts of the world.

Embassy representatives took part in the official opening of the Hindu Diwali Festival, which included the first Hindu chaplain in the U.S. Army as the featured guest.