

HAITI 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for the free exercise of all religions and faiths and the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. It states no one may be compelled to belong to a religious organization that is contrary to his or her belief. The government officially recognizes the Voodoo religion, but Voodoo priests were still unable to register for civil recognition of their marriages, baptisms, and other documents. The government remained legally obligated to provide funds and services to the Catholic Church not available to other religious groups, such as the Islamic community and Protestant denominations.

There were some reports of social bias against Voodoo practitioners. Muslim leaders noted a positive trend in societal attitudes.

U.S. embassy officials routinely met with government officials and religious and civil society leaders to seek their views on religious freedom matters and to discuss the recognition and registration of clergy of minority religious groups. Embassy representatives advocated for equal treatment of religious groups by the government and for tolerance among the various religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10 million (July 2014 estimate). The Haitian government does not collect statistics on religious affiliation, and estimates agreed upon by local religious leaders contrast with U.S. government estimates. The U.S. government estimates that 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 16 percent Protestant, 3 percent other religions, and 1 percent not subscribing to any religion. An estimated 50 percent of the population also practices Voodoo. However, estimates provided by Catholic, Protestant, and Voodoo leaders suggested approximately 50 percent of the population is Protestant (mostly Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian/Anglican), 40 percent Catholic, and 10 percent exclusive practitioners of Voodoo. Groups present in small numbers include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Rastafarians, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and atheists. According to societal leaders, an estimated 60-70 percent of the population practices some form of Voodoo, often blended with elements of other

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religions, usually Catholicism. Muslim leaders estimate their community at approximately 8,000 to 10,000. There are fewer than 100 Jews.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the free exercise of all religions and faiths and the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. It protects against being compelled to join a religious organization contrary to one's beliefs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations (MFA) is responsible for monitoring and administering laws relating to religious groups, while the Bureau of Worship, an office within the ministry, is responsible for registering churches and other religious buildings, clergy, and missionaries of various religious denominations.

Roman Catholicism's status as the official religion ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution; an 1860 concordat between the Holy See and the state remains in effect. The Vatican approves and selects a specific number of bishops in the country with the consent of the government. Under the concordat, the government continues to provide a monthly stipend to Catholic priests. Bishops have official license plates and carry diplomatic passports.

All religious groups are legally required to register with the MFA. Recognition affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. The government does not tax registered religious groups and exempts their imports from customs duties. Requirements for registration include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership directory, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the MFA.

Government Practices

Although the government granted official recognition to the Voodoo religion in 2003, enabling registration of Voodoo places of worship with the MFA, Voodoo priests were still unable to obtain the official registration required for civil recognition of their marriages. The director general (DG) of Religious Denominations, however, stated the MFA would register them in an official

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ceremony as soon as the president was available to preside over it. In the interim, the MFA accepted files requesting such recognition.

The MFA did not act on the pending request for recognition of Islam or communicate a reason for the inaction to the National Council of Muslims. The council did not make a new request during the year. Unlike Christians married in a church by a registered member of the clergy, Muslims married in a religious ceremony did not receive government recognition and needed to go through a civil court to obtain such recognition.

The government provided financial support for the maintenance of Catholic churches and to some Catholic schools. This system of financial support was not available to other religious groups, although the Protestant Federation began negotiations with the MFA in an attempt to receive similar financial support from the national budget.

Many nondenominational Christian groups as well as Muslims operated informally and did not seek official recognition. Religious leaders noted the government's hesitancy to extend recognition to Islam.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with a wide range of religious groups operated privately funded hospitals, clinics, schools, and orphanages. Foreign missionaries often entered as tourists and submitted paperwork to the MFA similar to that required of domestic religious groups.

The authorities generally permitted prisoners and detainees to exercise their religious beliefs freely and have access to a Protestant minister, Catholic priest, or Voodoo leader, when they were available. Government sources stated institutional capacity restricted their ability to provide the full range of religious services requested by Muslims, particularly in facilities outside Port-au-Prince. Volunteers provided religious services in some prisons.

Protestant and Catholic clergy reported good working relationships with the government. The Catholic Church and Protestant groups also ran schools and provided social services the government was unable to provide. In return, religious leaders reported that the government listened to their concerns and requests.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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Muslims reported that understanding of Islam was growing in society, and Muslims experienced less discrimination in everyday life. One example cited was that Muslim women no longer experienced discrimination for their distinctive dress.

Attitudes toward Voodoo ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. Voodoo community leaders stated Voodoo practitioners continued to experience some social stigmatization for their beliefs and practices. In Catholic and Protestant schools, teachers and administrators at times openly rejected and condemned Voodoo culture and customs as contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with government officials to advocate fair and equal treatment of all religious groups. They spoke several times with the DG of Religious Denominations to reinforce their message.

U.S. embassy representatives met with faith-based nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders to seek their views on religious freedom and on religion's role in political culture and the country's development. They reached out to the Voodoo and Muslim communities to learn how they viewed the state of religious freedom in society and to hear their concerns regarding official recognition and registration of clergy of minority religious groups. In meetings with Protestant and Catholic leaders, embassy representatives also advocated for tolerance of all religious groups and practices.