

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion. The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious reasons. Rastafarians remained concerned about government actions, which included extra scrutiny and searches.

Rastafarians stated that they experienced societal discrimination in employment and education.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with representatives of the government and civil society.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 102,918 (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2001 census, the Anglican Church (18 percent) and Pentecostals (18 percent) are the largest religious groups, followed by Methodists (11 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (10 percent), Baptists (10 percent), and Roman Catholics (7 percent). Other religious groups include Bahais, Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of God, and other evangelical groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion. An antiblasphemy law is not enforced.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish schools and provide religious instruction to those wishing to receive it. Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity, and Christian prayers generally are recited at school assemblies; however, attendance and participation are not mandatory. Students wishing to opt out of Christian prayer or religious education classes may be excused from participation.

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Representatives from different religious groups, especially Anglican and Catholic, are occasionally invited to speak to students. Teachers may provide information on other religious groups.

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

Government Practices

Rastafarians expressed concern about the government's prohibition of marijuana use, which they described as integral to their religious rituals. Rastafarians stated that they faced extra scrutiny from police and immigration officials. They also said that some officials forced Rastafarians to cut their dreadlocks and that prison meals did not meet their religious dietary requirements.

The government occasionally organized interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization consisting of the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist Churches, and the Salvation Army.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians reported that, although societal attitudes toward their community have improved, they experienced informal discrimination in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials met with government officials and religious leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, including the Rastafarians' concerns about societal discrimination and government policies.