

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of worship as well as the right to practice and change one's religion. The government decriminalized marijuana and publicly apologized to the Rastafarian community for previous discrimination. During the year the government started subsidizing private Rastafarian-run schools not requiring vaccinations for school entry.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials engaged representatives of the government and civil society on religious freedom issues, including the importance of respect for religious diversity. They discussed issues involving government facilitation of religious diversity and tolerance and equal treatment under the law and the required vaccination of children entering the public school system.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 96,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17.6 percent of the population is Anglican, 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 12.2 percent Pentecostal, 8.3 percent Moravian, 8.2 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those with unspecified or no religious beliefs account for 5.5 percent and 5.9 percent of the population, respectively. Members of the Baptist Church, the Church of God, and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium each account for less than 5 percent. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups, including Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is, without providing percentages for each group. According to anecdotal information, these four religious groups are listed from largest to smallest.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of worship as well as the right to change and practice the religion of one's choosing. The constitution protects individuals from taking oaths contradictory to their beliefs or participating in events and activities of

religions not their own, including participating in or receiving unwanted religious education. These rights may be limited in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health, or to protect the rights of others, unless actions under such limitations can be shown “not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. The government does not enforce a law outlawing blasphemous language in a public place or any other place that would “cause annoyance to the public.”

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, to receive tax and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property, religious groups must register with the government. To register, religious groups must fill out an online tax form that describes the group’s activities. The government uses this form to determine the group’s tax status. The Inland Revenue Department reviews and approves the completed form, usually granting registration and tax concessions.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Private schools may provide religious instruction. Public schools require parents to immunize their children to attend school. Some private schools do not require immunizations for their students. The law also permits home schooling.

The government passed a law decriminalizing marijuana for any kind of use in March.

Occupational health regulations require individuals with dreadlocks to cover their hair when they work with food, hazardous equipment, or in the health sector. These regulations apply to both public- and private-sector workplaces.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Following marijuana decriminalization, the government publicly apologized to the Rastafarian community for previous discrimination. The Rastafarian community had argued against previous prohibition of marijuana, stating it was a restriction to their religious practice and that marijuana was integral to the community’s religious rituals. In the wake of decriminalization, Rastafarian leaders said

publicly the government had taken steps to recognize the dignity and worth of the Rastafarian community.

Public schools generally continued to require children be vaccinated, which Rastafarians stated was against their religious beliefs; however, some private schools offered exemptions to this policy. Some Rastafarian children attended private schools not requiring immunizations. While the government generally does not provide subsidies to private schools, during the year it helped the Rastafarian community establish schools for its children and started subsidizing private Rastafarian-run schools not requiring vaccinations for school entry, including paying salaries for some teachers. Other Rastafarians chose to home school their children.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials engaged government officials from the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, as well as police leadership, to emphasize the importance of respect for religious diversity and equal treatment under the law.

Embassy officials also met with civil society representatives, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Christian Council, to discuss religious freedom issues, including the importance of freedom of religious expression and discrimination based on religion.