

# **SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES 2015 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 said they disagreed with the government's ban on using marijuana, stating it was integral to their religious rituals.

Rastafarians stated they experienced discrimination in employment.

U.S. embassy officials met with the government, religious leaders, and other members of civil society to discuss religious freedom, including Rastafarians' complaints of societal discrimination and the government's policy against marijuana use.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 103,000 (July 2015 estimate), with Anglicans comprising 47 percent, Methodists 28 percent, and Roman Catholics 13 percent. Other religious groups include Bahais, Rastafarians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, 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.

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. Christian prayers are recited at school assemblies; however, attendance and participation are not mandatory. Students wishing to opt out of Christian prayer or religious education classes are excused from participation. Representatives from different

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

An antiblasphemy law is not enforced.

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

### **Government Practices**

According to the Caribbean Rastafari Organization, Rastafarians continued to disagree with the government's prohibition of marijuana use, which they described as integral to their religious rituals. Rastafarians stated they faced scrutiny from police and immigration officials. They also expressed concern about discrimination in schools.

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

Rastafarians reported that they continued to experience discrimination in hiring.

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

U.S. embassy officials met with the government, religious leaders, and other members of civil society to discuss religious freedom, including Rastafarians' complaints of societal discrimination and the government's policy against marijuana use.