

BARBADOS 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of religion, including the freedom to change religion, and prohibit discrimination based on religious belief. Rastafarians were concerned about access to public education. Muslims objected to government policy that required women to remove the hijab for identification and passport photographs.

Rastafarians stated they faced subtle discrimination, especially in hiring.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and engaged religious group leaders and civil society, including the leadership of the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, on freedom of religious expression and discrimination.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 291,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2010 census, the most recently available, approximately 76 percent of the population is Christian, with the two largest groups Anglicans (23.9 percent) and Pentecostals (19.5 percent), followed by Seventh-day Adventists (5.9 percent), Methodists (4.2 percent), and Roman Catholics (3.8 percent). There are small numbers of Baptists, Moravians, Wesleyans, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Approximately 20.6 percent of respondents did not identify a religious affiliation. Other religious groups, which together constitute less than 3 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, Bahais, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Barbados Muslim Association states there are 3,000 Muslims.

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, and prohibits discrimination based on creed. A law criminalizing "blasphemous libel" is unenforced.

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Religious groups are required to register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office to obtain duty free import privileges and tax benefits. To register, a religious group must file the applicable form, with a resolution passed by the majority of its board of trustees expressly authorizing the application, and a related statutory declaration.

The public school curriculum includes religious “values education.” The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from other religious groups are also invited to speak to students. Students may excuse themselves from this segment and from morning prayers on religious grounds. The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and to provide religious instruction.

Government Practices

Rastafarians stated their objection to the government’s enforcement of the prohibition on marijuana use, which they said was integral to their religious rituals. They reported extra scrutiny from police and immigration officials and complained that the government required them to remove head coverings in identification photos and at security checkpoints.

Rastafarians stated they faced discrimination in schools. According to the Caribbean Rastafarian Organization, schools required vaccinations for enrollment, which the organization stated violated their religious beliefs.

Muslims said they objected to a government policy requiring women to remove their hijab for identification and passport photographs. The Barbados Muslim Association asked the government to change its practices to permit head coverings in identification photographs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians stated they faced subtle discrimination, especially in hiring.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government.

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Embassy officials engaged religious group leaders and civil society, including the leadership of the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, on freedom of religious expression and discrimination.