

# **SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Organization for Rastafarians in Unity (ORU) said Rastafarians continued to experience discrimination in school enrollment and in celebrating their religious holidays. The ORU protested what they stated was police harassment and the mandatory cutting of dreadlocks while in prison. The ORU said the government continued to prohibit their use of marijuana for religious rituals.

According to the ORU, Rastafarians faced societal discrimination, including when seeking employment, because of their dreadlocks, which they said were an important component of their faith.

U.S. embassy officers met with government officials to discuss religious freedom, including issues of the Rastafarian community. Embassy officials also spoke with the St. Kitts and Nevis Christian Council and a leader of the Rastafarian community.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates a total population of 52,000 (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17 percent of the population is Anglican; 16 percent Methodist; 11 percent Pentecostal; 7 percent Church of God; 6 percent Roman Catholic; 5 percent each Baptist, Moravian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Wesleyan Holiness; 4 percent other; 2 percent each Brethren, evangelical Christian, and Hindu; 1 percent each Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim, and Rastafarian; and less than 1 percent each Bahai, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army. Nine percent claimed no religious affiliation.

## **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. It prohibits discrimination based on religious belief.

The Ministry of Social and Community Development is responsible for registering religious groups. Religious groups are not required to register, but doing so provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information to the groups.

The constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain schools at the community's own expense. Public schools offer Christian religious instruction, daily prayers, and religious assemblies, but students who object are exempt from all religious activities.

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

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

### **Government Practices**

ORU representatives stated Rastafarians face increased police harassment.

The government charged Rastafarian groups wishing to celebrate Kwanzaa in government-run community centers 400 East Caribbean dollars (\$148) but offered the centers to Christian groups for tree lighting ceremonies for free.

ORU representatives said prison officials required Rastafarian prisoners to cut their hair. Prison officials said that Rastafarians were not required to cut their hair unless their hair posed a health issue such as lice. The prison did not provide different diets based on religious restrictions. Special diets were offered only to accommodate prisoners with health restrictions.

Rastafarian representatives continued to state that marijuana, banned by law, was integral to their religious rituals.

The ORU said public and private school officials refused to enroll Rastafarian children because, in accordance with their faith, they did not vaccinate their children. The Ministry of Health continued to state that children must be immunized to enter school.

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

According to the ORU, Rastafarians faced discrimination in seeking employment and in society. The ORU said many hotels prohibited their staff from wearing dreadlocks.

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

U.S. embassy officers engaged government officials on religious freedom issues. Embassy representatives discussed the impact of government policies and societal attitudes on Rastafarians with a leader of the Rastafarian community and with the former head of the Christian Council.