

# **BARBADOS 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of religion, including the freedom to change one's religion, and prohibit discrimination based on religious belief. The government does not require religious groups to register and grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction. In October, the government announced its approval of an exemption for official photographs to allow male and female applicants to wear religiously-mandated head coverings. The exemption will apply to passport, drivers' licenses, and national identification card photographs, among others. Muslim and Rastafarian communities requested the exemption and said they were pleased with the outcome. On September 15, the government announced its intention to decriminalize the personal use and possession of small amounts of marijuana, legally recognize same-sex civil unions, and raise the question of whether same-sex marriage should be legal through a public referendum. Some religious leaders, including of the Anglican Church, expressed opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage and said they would not perform same-sex marriage ceremonies. Asheba Trotman, the head of the Rastafarian community organization Ichirouganaim Council for the Advancement of Rastafari (ICAR), welcomed marijuana decriminalization, but said the community hoped eventually further measures would enable them to cultivate marijuana on their farms for personal as well as commercial use.

ICAR head Trotman said that in the organization's view, social attitudes had changed, and Rastafarians were well accepted.

On October 8, the Ambassador hosted an event with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. Representatives from the Anglican, Pentecostal, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of the Nazarene, and Jewish communities participated.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 295,000 (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the most recent census in 2010, approximately 76 percent of the population is Christian, including Anglicans (23.9 percent of the total population), Pentecostals (19.5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5.9 percent), Methodists (4.2 percent), Roman Catholics (3.8 percent), Wesleyans (3.4 percent),

Church of the Nazarenes (3.2 percent), and the Church of God (2.4 percent). Religious groups with 2 percent or less of the population each include Baptists, Moravians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups, together constituting less than 3 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Approximately 21 percent of respondents do not identify a 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, and prohibition of discrimination based on creed. A law criminalizing "blasphemous libel" is not enforced.

The government requires religious groups to register only in order to obtain duty-free import privileges and tax benefits. A religious group must file the relevant customs and tax forms with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office, along with a resolution passed by the majority of its board of trustees expressly authorizing the application, plus the group's related statutory declaration.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction. The government provides subsidies or financial assistance to some of these schools to help cover the cost of students who could not find space in a public school. The public school curriculum includes religious "values education" as part of the historic association of schools with Christian missionaries, who founded many of the schools. At the primary school level, the focus is on nondenominational Christianity. At the secondary school level, all major religions are included. The constitution protects students from mandatory religious instruction, ceremony, or observance without personal consent or, if younger than age 21, consent of parents or guardians.

By law, vaccinations are required for all school-age children attending both public and private schools as well as those who are homeschooled. The vaccination program is administered through the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. There are no exceptions for religious beliefs. Homeschooled children must be registered with the Ministry of Education.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## Government Practices

In October, the government announced its approval of an exemption for official photographs to allow male and female applicants to wear religiously-mandated head coverings. Government officials said the exemption would apply to passport, drivers' licenses, and national identification card photographs, among others. Muslim and Rastafarian communities requested the exemption and said they were pleased with the outcome.

On September 15, the government announced its intention to decriminalize the personal use and possession of small amounts of marijuana (half an ounce or less), legally recognize same-sex civil unions, and raise the question of whether same-sex marriage should be legal through a public referendum. Leaders of the Anglican and Pentecostal Churches expressed opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage. According to the government, the decision to recognize same-sex civil unions was justified to protect individuals' civil rights. According to media, on September 22 the Anglican Church of Barbados announced it would not recognize the legitimacy of same-sex marriage. The Anglican Church said its decision was based on the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in England, which found that marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman. Anglican leaders said they would not perform same-sex marriage ceremonies. Leaders of other religious groups also said they would oppose any government actions that would compel them to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Based on media reports, there appeared to be minimal opposition from mainstream religious organizations to the government's marijuana decriminalization decision, which makes possession of small amounts unlawful and subject to a fine of 200 Barbados dollars (\$100) rather than an arrest. An ICAR member said the Rastafarian community welcomed the decriminalization decision and hoped it would ultimately lead to measures enabling them to engage in marijuana cultivation on their farms for personal use as well as commercial opportunities. The ICAR representative said the commercial and medicinal benefits of marijuana cultivation were well established, and the community was optimistic about further liberalization.

ICAR head Asheba Trotman reported the discrimination she said her community experienced in years past had diminished and for the most part its members were accepted. Trotman said that among its younger members, Rastafarianism was considered a cultural movement with a strong connection to the African legacy that

the vast majority of Barbadians shared. She said younger members did not think of Rastafarianism as a religious organization.

According to Trotman, Rastafarians continued to object to the government's vaccination requirement for school enrollment.

Leaders of religious organizations said COVID-19 public health restrictions on gatherings, although applied equally in the country, adversely impacted their finances, limited their ability to conduct in-person services, and hampered their membership growth prospects. Several organizations reported they successfully implemented online services to offset the public gathering limits.

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

Family-Faith-Freedom, a group whose members represent 49 churches across the country, organized weekly marches against the legalization of same-sex unions. Social media reaction to news coverage of these events was very critical of the marches. Some commentators urged churches to focus on other issues, said march organizers were hypocritical, ignorant, or bigoted, or affirmed their support of same-sex unions or the right to privacy.

A Rastafarian community leader said discrimination against community members had diminished and societal acceptance and tolerance had increased, including in the workplace.

According to church leaders, a positive aspect of COVID-19 restrictions was a net increase in combined online and in-person participation in worship services compared to pre-COVID-19 numbers. The leaders said online worship opportunities enabled leaders to engage younger individuals, whom they said were essential to their growth prospects because religious community membership across the country was generally skewed towards individuals over 60 years old.

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

On October 8, the Ambassador hosted an event with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. Among those invited, representatives from the Anglican, Pentecostal, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of Nazarene, and Jewish communities participated.