

SURINAME 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to choose or change one's religion, and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The government provided wages for teachers at schools managed by religious organizations.

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

The U.S. embassy interacted with leaders of all different religious backgrounds. These included periodic outreach events with religious groups, participation in local religious services, and holiday celebrations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 573,300 (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2012 census, approximately 48.4 percent of the population is Christian of which 21.6 percent is Roman Catholic. A wide range of other groups, including Moravian, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, evangelical Protestant, Baptist, Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), make up the remaining Christian population. Hindus make up 22 percent of the population, including the Sanathan Dharma and the Arya Dewaker. Muslims, including Sunni, Ahmadiyya, and the World Islamic Call Society, make up 13.9 percent. Approximately 3 percent adhere to indigenous religions. Bahais, Jews, Buddhists, Brahma Kumaris, and Hare Krishnas are also present in small numbers. There are three Rastafarian organizations: Aya Bingi Order, 12th Tribe, and Bobo Shanti.

Some Amerindian and Maroon populations adhere to indigenous religions. Some Amerindians, concentrated principally in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practice shamanism through a medicine man (*piaiman*). Many Maroons worship nature through a practice that has no special name, and others, as well as some Creoles in urban areas, worship their ancestors through a rite called *wintie*. Citizens of Amerindian and Maroon origin who identify as Christian often combine Christian practices with indigenous religious customs.

There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion. Many political parties have strong ethnic ties, and members tend to belong to the same religious group. With

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the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious groups are not concentrated in any particular region.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution protects the right of freedom of religion and specifically bans discrimination based on religion. The constitution permits individuals to choose or change their religion. It categorizes the right to religious freedom as a “personal right and freedom” and states that any violation can be brought before a court of justice.

The penal code provides for punishment of those responsible for publicly, verbally, and/or in writing, drawing or instigating hate or discrimination of persons based on religion or philosophy of life with a prison term no longer than two years, and a fine of up to 2,000 Surinamese dollars (SRD) (\$597).

An individual who makes a public statement that knowingly, or with reasonable suspicion, can be insulting to a group of persons because of its religion or philosophy of life can be punished by up to six months in prison or a fine of SRD 500 (\$149). The same penalty applies to those whose public statements can lead to discrimination toward or hate of a group of persons, or to violence against a person or goods of persons, because of their religion or philosophy of life. A law that prohibits blasphemy in various forms and penalizes it with fines and imprisonment is not enforced.

The law does not permit religious instruction in public schools, although public schools celebrate various religious holidays. Parents may not homeschool children for religious or other reasons. They may enroll their children in private schools, many of which have a religious affiliation. Some religious groups manage their own primary and secondary schools, which include religious instruction.

Government Practices

The government provided limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious groups. While the teachers were civil service employees, religious groups provided all funding with the exception of teachers’ salaries and a small maintenance stipend for the schools.

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The armed forces maintained a staff chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel of all religious groups. While the chaplaincy provided interfaith services, personnel were also welcome to attend outside religious services.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Inter-Religious Council consisted of representatives of five religious groups: two Hindu groups, two Muslim groups, and the Catholic Church. Council members met monthly to discuss planned interfaith activities and their positions on government policies. The government partially supported and consulted with the council.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials continued to promote understanding among religious groups through regular outreach to the Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities. Embassy officers attended interfaith cultural events to express U.S. support for religious tolerance.