

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of worship as well as the right to practice and change religion. Rastafarians continued to express concern that government practices, including the prohibition of marijuana use, required vaccination for entry to public schools, and headdress restrictions, negatively impacted their religious activities and convictions. They also reported being subjected to undue scrutiny at security checkpoints.

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

The U.S. embassy engaged representatives of the government and civil society on religious freedom issues.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 94,000 (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17.6 percent of the population is Anglican, 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 12.2 percent Pentecostal, 8.3 percent Moravian, 8.2 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those having unspecified or no religious beliefs account for 5.5 percent and 5.9 percent of the population, respectively. Members of the Baptist Church, the Church of God, and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium each account for less than 5 percent. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups, including Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Bahais.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of worship as well as the right to change and practice the religion of one's choosing. The constitution protects individuals from taking oaths contradictory to their beliefs or participating in events and activities of religions not their own, including participating in or receiving unwanted religious education. These freedoms may be limited in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality or health, or to protect the rights of others, unless actions under such limitations can be shown "not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society." The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from

running for elected office. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. The law that outlaws blasphemous language is not enforced.

In order to receive tax and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property, religious groups must register with the government. To register, religious groups must fill out an online tax form which determines the group's activities and the corresponding taxes. The completed form is submitted to the Inland Revenue Department for review and approval. Registration and tax statuses are routinely granted.

Public schools do not allow religious instruction. Private religious schools may provide religious instruction.

The law 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

The Caribbean Rastafari Organization (CRO) said the government's prohibition of marijuana restricted the practice of their religious rights because marijuana was integral to their religious rituals. The CRO said Rastafarians disagreed with the public school requirement that children be vaccinated, which it stated was against the religious beliefs of Rastafarians. The organizations also said the requirement to remove head coverings for passport photos and at security checkpoints was an infringement of Rastafarians' religious rights. Members of religious groups were permitted to wear their head coverings for passport photos if they provided a letter from their religious organization verifying membership.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers engaged various government officials on religious freedom. Embassy officers also met with members of nongovernmental organizations,

religious leaders, including leaders of minority religious groups, and the head of the Christian Council to discuss religious freedom issues.