

BARBADOS 2019 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. Rastafarians expressed frustration with the government's proposed Medicinal Cannabis Industry Bill, stating it did not address prohibition of marijuana use in their religious rituals, and called on the government to engage in meaningful dialogue on the broader decriminalization and legalization of cannabis. In November Attorney General Dale Marshall announced he had received cabinet approval to draft a bill permitting Rastafarians to use cannabis "for the purpose of their religion." Some Muslims said they continued to object to a government policy requiring women to remove the hijab for identification photographs, including for passports, while noting progress in their talks with the government to revise the policy and find a mutually agreeable solution.

Rastafarians continued to report some social discrimination, specifically for their dreadlocks and particularly in hiring practices; however, they stated societal attitudes regarding Rastafarianism continued to improve.

U.S. embassy officials raised religious freedom with government ministries and offices at all levels. Embassy officials engaged with the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and People Empowerment to discuss the cannabis legalization movement and its significance for the Rastafarian community. Embassy officials also engaged civil society and religious groups, including the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, on religious expression and societal or governmental discrimination based on religion or belief.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 294,000 (midyear 2019 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), 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. 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 prohibition of discrimination based on creed. A law criminalizing "blasphemous libel" is not enforced.

The government does not require religious groups to register. To obtain duty-free import privileges and tax benefits, however, the government requires religious groups to register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office. A religious group must file the relevant customs and tax forms, 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. 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

Rastafarians expressed objections to the government's proposed Medicinal Cannabis Industry Bill, introduced in August, which would legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes, while remaining silent on whether other personal use, including for religious rituals, would remain prohibited.

In September Adrian Forde, a member of the Parliament's Joint Select Committee on the Medicinal Cannabis Industry Bill, stated the committee would begin discussions on the use of marijuana for sacramental purposes. In November Attorney General Dale Marshall announced he had received cabinet approval to draft a bill permitting Rastafarians to use cannabis "for the purpose of their religion."

In August the Ministry of Agriculture pledged to set aside 60 acres for Rastafarians to grow medicinal cannabis. Some Rastafarians objected to language in the draft bill because it would bar anyone with a prior drug conviction from obtaining a license to participate in the industry. Rastafarian Priest Ras Ian said many community members, including himself, had prior possession convictions and were concerned that the current language in the bill would effectively block many Rastafarians from participating in the nascent medical cannabis industry.

Some Rastafarians continued to state that police and immigration officials often asked them to remove head coverings and gave extra scrutiny to Rastafarian women at checkpoints as pretexts to search for marijuana.

Rastafarians continued to state the requirement for vaccinations for all children to enroll in all schools and for homeschooling violated Rastafarian religious beliefs.

In August Rastafarian representatives praised the minister of creative economy, culture, and sports, who issued a public statement calling on all citizens to "embrace" Rastafarians as equal members of society.

Representatives from the Barbados Muslim Association continued to state their objection to a government policy requiring women to remove all head coverings for identification photographs, including for passports. The association met with the government to discuss the issue and said the continuing talks were positive and could yield a change in the policy.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some Rastafarians again reported societal discrimination, particularly in hiring practices. Rastafarian sources, however, also said they believed public opinion of their community was improving. African Heritage Foundation founder Paul Rock commented that Rastafarians had previously experienced societal discrimination for a dietary lifestyle that was now widely adopted by vegans.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials raised freedom of religious expression discrimination issues at all levels. Embassy officials engaged with the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and People Empowerment to discuss the cannabis legalization movement and its significance for the Rastafarian community.

Embassy officials engaged leaders and members of civil society and religious groups, including the Muslim and Rastafarian communities, regarding the importance of religious expression and concerns regarding societal or governmental discrimination based on religion or belief. The embassy used Facebook to promote messages on the importance of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity across the Eastern Caribbean, including a “Voices of Religious Freedom” video posted in August.