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Guyana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 83,000 square miles and a population of 751,000. Data from a 2002 census on religious affiliation indicated that approximately 57 percent of the population was Christian, broken down as follows: 17 percent Pentecostal, 8 percent Roman Catholic, 7 percent Anglican, 5 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 20 percent other Christian groups. Approximately 28 percent of the population was Hindu, 7 percent was Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 2 percent practiced other beliefs, including members of the Rastafarian Movement and the Bahai Faith. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religion. Some religious groups claimed higher membership than reflected by the 2002 census.

The country is ethnically diverse, reflecting East Indian, African, Chinese, and European ancestry, as well as a significant indigenous population. Most religious groups can claim membership from a cross section of ethnic groups, with two exceptions: most Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The law protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret religious beliefs for themselves. Members of all religious groups worshipped freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion.

While the government recognized religious groups of all faiths, they must register with the government to receive formal recognition. Religious groups seeking to establish operations must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Access to Amerindian areas requires the permission of the local village council.

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents were free to send their children to the school of their choice.

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) coordinated with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major religious groups conducted prayer services and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Although no official GDF policy required attendance at religious services, anecdotal evidence from GDF officers suggested that individual commanders required attendance at some religious programs. Membership in a particular religion did not confer any specific advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tended to favor Christians.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Christian--Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, and Christmas; Hindu--Phagwah (festival welcoming spring) and Diwali (festival of lights); Islamic--You-Man-Nabi (birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and Eid Al-Adha (feast of sacrifice).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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