



Guyana

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom 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 766,000. Data from a 2002 census on religious affiliation indicate that approximately 57 percent of the population is 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 is Hindu, 7 percent is Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 2 percent practice other beliefs, including members of the Rastafari movement and the Baha'i Faith. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religion. Some religious groups claim 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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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

While the Government recognizes 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. In the past, access to Amerindian areas required permission from the Ministry of Amerindian

Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs; however, under the 2006 revision of the Amerindian Act, only the permission of the local village council is required. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The Government observes the following 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).

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government imposes no requirements regarding religion for any official or nonofficial purposes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) makes an effort to coordinate with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major religious groups provided prayer and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Although no official GDF policy requires attendance at religious services, anecdotal evidence from GDF officers suggests 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.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for 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.