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## Haiti

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report**

Report

**September 13, 2011**

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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 some 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, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 9.9 million.

A UN Population Fund census released in 2006 (based on 2003 data) lists the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, and 3percent Seventh-day Adventist. There are Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Scientologists, and practitioners of Vodou (voodoo). Recent estimates indicate that half of the population practices Vodou, most of them along with other religious practices.

#### 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 constitution provides for the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

Historically, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, neither the government nor the Holy See renounced the 1860 concordat, which serves as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. As part of the concordat, the government continued to provide a monthly stipend to Catholic priests. However, the government recognized the increasing role of Protestant churches. During the reporting period, the Provisional Electoral Council included Protestant and Vodou representatives, as well as a representative from the Episcopal Church. At the end of the reporting period, the Catholic Church did not have a representative, as the sitting member resigned amid allegations of corruption.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Goods imported for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and the government does not tax registered churches. Requirements for registration with the bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Although legally permitted to register, many nondenominational Christian groups and Vodou practitioners operated informally and did not seek official recognition. There were no reports of this requirement restricting the operation of a religious group. The National Council of Muslims in Haiti applied for legal recognition and was awaiting approval at the end of the reporting period. They changed their application to apply for recognition under a new name, the National Council of Mosques, to gain recognition of existing Islamic structures and meeting places. The delay in approval appeared to be bureaucratic.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries entered as tourists and submitted paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Although there were delays in the issuing of residence permits, bureaucratic problems were regarded as the cause.

For most of the reporting period, prisoners and detainees were permitted religious observance and could request to see a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, or a Vodou leader. However, the government suspended these policies at the end of October in response to the nationwide cholera outbreak. In an attempt to curb the spread of cholera, the Administration of Prisons barred any outsider from entering prisons.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

#### 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 some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society, and citizens freely expressed their religious beliefs. Some religious groups were politically active. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward Vodou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity.

In November and December, mobs killed Vodou practitioners; they accused them of having spread cholera by placing contaminated powder into waterways. The Haitian National Police confirmed 31 killings; the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights, a nongovernmental organization, reported 22 additional suspected cases. Government officials at the ministerial level publicly denounced the killings, and local police confiscated 16 firearms, but at the end of the reporting period, no arrests had been made.

### 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. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views, including on religious freedom.

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