

HAITI 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

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

Embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views on religious freedom matters. Embassy programming in Haiti included advocacy to protect religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to a 2012 U.S. government estimate, the population is 9.8 million. Approximately 80 percent is Roman Catholic, 10 percent Baptist, 4 percent Pentecostal, 1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 1 percent other Protestant denominations. Other religious groups present in small numbers include Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Scientologists, and practitioners of Vodou (Voodoo). The leader of a prominent multid denominational group reports half the population practices some form of Vodou, often blended with elements of other religions, usually Catholicism. The press reports a growing number of Muslims since the 2010 earthquake, citing an estimate of 2,000 to 10,000 Muslims. There are fewer than 50 Jews.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations (MFA) is responsible for monitoring and administering religious

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groups, while the bureau of worship, an office within the ministry, is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

Roman Catholicism's status as the official religion ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, but an 1860 Concordat between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state remains in effect. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy; the Vatican approves a specific number of priests in the country, and the MFA chooses who will fill those posts. Under the Concordat, the government continues to provide a monthly stipend to Catholic priests.

According to the director general of the bureau of worship, the ministry spent \$1.4 million in 2011 (latest data available) to pay priests' salaries. The government also provides financial support to some Catholic schools. This system of financial support is not available to other organized religious groups.

MFA recognition affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Registered religious groups' imports are exempt from customs duties, and the government does not tax registered churches.

Requirements for registration 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 MFA.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom; however, some members of the Vodou and Muslim communities complained they did not enjoy the same legal protections as Christians.

Vodou leaders and civil society representatives expressed concern that the May passage of a constitutional amendment could again criminalize the practice of Vodou and lead to increased discrimination against Vodou adherents. Government officials, including the prime minister, immediately responded to these concerns and stressed that the new amendment would not limit the freedom of religious expression. Government officials noted that a 2003 presidential decree recognizing Vodou as a religious practice remained in force. In October and November, government officials met numerous times with Vodou leaders and

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practitioners to assuage lingering concerns. There were no reports of discrimination against the Vodou community arising from the May constitutional amendment.

The National Council of Muslims in Haiti reported that the MFA continued not to recognize it. Some Muslim religious leaders asserted the government was reluctant to recognize Islam. Muslims married in a religious ceremony did not receive the same government recognition accorded to Christians who married in the church and could obtain government recognition only through a civil court. According to the MFA, Muslims already had some official recognition from the government. The MFA maintained three separate offices to handle administrative issues for Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, Muslims, and those who practiced Vodou.

Many faith-based humanitarian groups arriving after the January 2010 earthquake remained undocumented. Although legally required 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 any religious group.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with a wide range of religious groups operated privately funded hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries often entered as tourists and submitted paperwork to the MFA similar to that required of domestic religious groups. Bureaucratic problems were the primary cause of delays in issuing residence permits.

The authorities generally permitted prisoners and detainees to practice their religions freely and to request access to a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, a Vodou leader, or a Muslim cleric. While prisoners and detainees have a legal right to religious observance, the government did not regularly provide religious services at major incarceration centers such as the National Penitentiary. Volunteers provided religious services in some prisons.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

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.

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Religion played a prominent role in society. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, citizens' attitudes toward Vodou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. The growing visibility of Islam after the 2010 earthquake expanded local perceptions of religious diversity and demonstrated the need for more sustained interfaith partnership to address the country's developmental challenges. Protestant religious leaders reported an excellent working relationship with the Catholic Church.

Religions for Peace and the Interfaith Council of Christian, Muslim, and Vodou groups conducted a series of interfaith dialogues on cholera awareness and the importance of the Creole language in promoting religious understanding.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy representatives routinely met with faith-based nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and government officials to seek their views on religious freedom and on religion's role in political culture and the country's development.