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Jamaica

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.

Rastafarians alleged that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them. There were no other 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 4,244 square miles and a population of 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), religious affiliation as a proportion of the population is: Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pentecostal, 10 percent; Baptist, 7 percent; Anglican, 4 percent; Roman Catholic, 2 percent; United Church, 2 percent; Methodist, 2 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; Moravian, 1 percent; Brethren, 1 percent; unstated, 3 percent; and "other," 10 percent. The category "other" included 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Bahais. The census reported that 21 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

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.

Parliament may act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there is also at least one Jewish school.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, 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.

A Rastafarian sect, the Church of Haile Selassie I, has sought religious incorporation for 14 years without success. The church's most recent hearing before a parliamentary joint select subcommittee was in February 2010. Some in parliament maintained that the church should be denied incorporation because it uses marijuana, which is illegal, in religious services. The church, however, claimed that this was not the case and that it used legal herbs.

Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them; however, it was not clear whether such complaints reflected discrimination on the basis of religious belief or were due to the group's alleged illegal use of marijuana as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

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

Rastafarians alleged that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on religious matters. Muslim and Jewish groups reported that society was very tolerant of diverse religious affiliation.

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. Representatives of the U.S. embassy met with members of the Jewish, Muslim, and Rastafarian communities as well as with representatives of the Jamaican Council of Churches to discuss topics related to religious freedom.

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