



## Jamaica

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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 period covered by this report.

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 4,244 square miles and a population of 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), the population's religious affiliation consists of 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" includes 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha'is. The census reported that 21 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

#### Section II. Status of 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 at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion.

The Government observes Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Parliament may act freely 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 also is at least one Jewish school.

##### 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 period covered by this report.

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 illegal use of marijuana as part of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003 a parliamentary joint select committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use. In April 2006 the Senate passed a resolution to have the committee reconvene and conclude its deliberations. The bill was never brought for a vote, and the current Government has not given any indication of when it will be reconsidered.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no 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.

#### 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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