

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government 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.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officers also met with the local human rights association and engaged in discussions about religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

A 2011 World Bank report estimates the population at 109,000. According to the 2001 census, the Anglican Church (18 percent) and Pentecostals (18 percent) are the largest religious groups, followed by Methodists (11 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (10 percent), Baptists (10 percent), and Roman Catholics (7 percent). Other religious groups include Bahais, Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of God, and other evangelical groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The anti-blasphemy law is not enforced.

Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity and Christian prayers generally take place at school assemblies; however, attendance and participation are not mandatory. Students wishing to opt out of Christian prayer or religious education classes may be excused from participation in religious activities. Representatives from different religious

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

groups, especially Anglican and Catholic, are occasionally invited to speak to students. Teachers may provide information on other religious groups.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Rastafarians complained that marijuana was integral to their religious rituals.

The government occasionally organized interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization consisting of the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist Churches, and the Salvation Army.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Rastafarians, however, complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government as part of an overall policy to promote human rights. Government officials and the local human rights organization raised no concerns about religious freedom in these meetings.