



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### St. Vincent and the Grenadines

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150 square miles and a population of 117,000. Christianity was the dominant religion. The Anglican Church consisted of approximately 24,000 members, with one-third described as active. Approximately 11,000 citizens were Roman Catholic, with a majority of them being active. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also claimed 11,000 members and described 50 percent as active. The Methodist Church had 4,500 active members registered with congregations, although more claimed affiliation in the previous census. There were twenty to thirty different Pentecostal denominations in the country, with the largest, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies, claiming approximately twenty congregations. There was a small Salvation Army presence estimated at seventy members. The number of non-Christians was small; the Baha'i Faith had approximately 1,500 adherents, and there was a smaller number of Rastafarians.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity; however, students are not forced to participate in religious instruction. Representatives from different religious groups are occasionally invited to speak to students. Most speakers represent the Anglican or Catholic churches. Teachers are also allowed to provide information on other religious groups.

The Government occasionally organizes interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization comprised of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist churches and the Salvation Army.

##### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, pertinent to their religious rituals, was illegal.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The Christian Council of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian religious groups, although no evangelical church has joined.

Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools. Tension continued to exist among some Christian denominations, with evangelical Christians allegedly criticizing Catholics and mainstream Protestants for adhering to "slave religions." Baha'i representatives noted that some followers hid their religious affiliation to avoid criticism and discrimination.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy also discusses religious freedom with local groups and other organizations.

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