



Suriname

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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 63,037 square miles and a population of 493,000. According to the 2004 census, an estimated 27 percent of the inhabitants trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, 18 percent identify themselves as Creoles of African descent, 15 percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and 15 percent are of Maroon descent, or descendants of escaped slaves. Smaller percentages claim Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, or Dutch descent.

According to recent census data, 40.7 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholics and other Protestant groups—among them Moravian, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, Evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist; 20 percent is Hindu, 13.5 percent is Muslim, 3.3 percent follow indigenous religions, 15 percent claim to not know their religion, 4.4 percent claim no faith, and 2.5 percent declare unspecified faiths. Indigenous religions are practiced by the Amerindian and Afro-descendant Maroon populations. Amerindians, found principally in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practice shamanism, a worship of all living things, through a medicine man, or piaiman. Maroons, who inhabit the interior, worship nature through a practice that has no special name, and they also worship their ancestors through a rite called wintie. Citizens of Amerindian and Maroon origin who classify themselves as Christian often simultaneously follow indigenous religious customs, with the acknowledgment of their Christian church leaders.

The Jewish community numbers 150, and there are small numbers of Baha'is and Buddhists. Other groups include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the World Islamic Call Society.

Missionaries are present.

Many political parties, including six of the eight governing coalition parties, have strong ethnic ties, and members tend to adhere to or practice one faith. For example, within the governing coalition, the majority of members of the mostly ethnic-Creole National Party of Suriname (NPS) is Moravian, members of the mostly ethnic-Indian United Reformed Party are Hindu, and those of the mostly ethnic-Javanese Pertjaja Luhur Party tend to be Muslim. However, parties have no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular religion. For example, the President, who is also the leader of the NPS, is a practicing Catholic.

There is no direct correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic status; however, those who practice indigenous religions in the small villages of the interior generally have a lower socioeconomic status. With the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious communities are not heavily concentrated in any particular region.

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.

There are five holy days that are celebrated as official holidays: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Eid al-Fitr (Islamic), and Christmas (Christian). Persons of all religious groups tended to celebrate these holidays.

The Government does not establish requirements for recognition of religious faiths, nor are religious groups required to register with the Government.

Foreign missionaries face no special restrictions. They are subject to the standard requirement of an entry visa.

The armed forces maintain a chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel of all religious groups. While the chaplaincy provides interfaith services, personnel are also welcome to attend outside religious services.

The government educational system provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious organizations. While the teachers are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend. Religious instruction in public schools is permitted but not required. Schools offer religious instruction in a variety of faiths.

Parents are not permitted to homeschool their children for religious or other reasons; however, they may enroll their children in private schools, many of which have a religious affiliation. Students in public schools are allowed to practice all elements of their religion, including wearing headscarves, crosses, or yarmulkes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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 belief or practice.

There is an interreligious council composed of representatives of various religious groups. Council members meet at least twice per month to discuss planned ecumenical activities and their position on government policies. The council is partially supported by and consults with the state.

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 maintained a regular dialogue with leaders of various religious communities and held three roundtable discussions with interfaith groups.

Following the 2006 controversy and subsequent violence surrounding cartoons in a Danish newspaper depicting the Prophet Muhammad, embassy officials engaged in a dialogue with one of the largest Islamic organizations in the country to discuss freedom of religion in the context of human rights.

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