

# **HAITI 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The Islamic community and Voudou (Voodoo) practitioners continued to be unable to obtain legal recognition by the government.

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

U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views on religious freedom matters. Embassy-sponsored programs included a roundtable discussion on tolerance that included various religious groups.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.9 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 16 percent is Protestant (10 percent Baptist, 4 percent Pentecostal, 1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 1 percent other denominations). An estimated 1 percent of the population does not hold religious beliefs. Religious groups present in small numbers include Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Rastafarians, Scientologists, and practitioners of Voudou. Local Voudou community leaders state that most people practice some form of Voudou, often blended with elements of other religions, usually Catholicism. The press continued to report a growing number of Muslims since the 2010 earthquake, with most sources citing an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Muslims. There are fewer than 100 Jews.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious

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Denominations (MFA) is responsible for monitoring and administering law relating to religious groups, while the Bureau of Worship, an office within the ministry, is responsible for registering churches and other religious buildings, clergy, and missionaries of various religious denominations.

Roman Catholicism's status as the official religion ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, but an 1860 concordat between the Holy See and the state remains in effect. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy. The Vatican approves and selects a specific number of bishops in the country with the consent of the Haitian government. Under the concordat, the government continues to provide a monthly stipend to Catholic priests. According to the director general of the Bureau of Worship, the ministry pays church-approved priests 5,000 Haitian gourds (HTG – \$115) per month, bishops between 15,000 HTG and 20,000 HTG (\$344 to \$459) per month, and the country's two archbishops 25,000 HTG (\$574) per month. The government also provides financial support to some Catholic schools. This system of financial support is not available to other religious groups.

All religious groups are legally required to register with the MFA. Recognition affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. The government does not tax registered religious groups and exempts their imports from customs duties. Requirements for registration include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the MFA.

### **Government Practices**

The MFA continued to deny recognition to the National Council of Muslims, noting that certain Islamic practices, such as polygamy, which conflict with Haitian law, could not be recognized by the state. Unlike Christians married in a church, Muslims married in a religious ceremony did not receive government recognition, and needed to go through a civil court to obtain such recognition. This was also required of Voodoo practitioners married in religious ceremonies. The MFA maintained three separate offices to handle administrative issues for Catholics and non-Catholic Christians, Muslims, and Voodoo practitioners. The government did not take action to advance or create draft legislation extending official recognition to Voodoo or Islam, although both groups called on it to do so. There were, however, no reports that the lack of official recognition restricted the operations of

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any religious group. Many nondenominational Christian groups and Voudou practitioners operated informally and did not seek official recognition.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with a wide range of religious groups operated privately funded hospitals, clinics, schools, and orphanages. Foreign missionaries often entered as tourists and submitted paperwork to the MFA similar to that required of domestic religious groups.

The authorities generally permitted prisoners and detainees to exercise their religious beliefs freely and have access to a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, or a Voudou leader, when they were available. Prisoners reported that the government did not deny access to Muslim clerics if desired, but government sources stated that institutional capacity at times impacted their ability to provide the full range of religious services requested, particularly in facilities outside Port-au-Prince. The two exceptions where such a range of services was available were the National Penitentiary and the Petionville Women's Prison, both located in Port-au-Prince. Volunteers provided religious services in some prisons.

Religious leaders were able to and, on occasion did, freely criticize the government.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion played a prominent role in society, and religious groups were active in providing social services. Religions for Peace, an interreligious platform composed of both officially appointed and non-official members from Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Episcopal, and Voudou clergies, mediated negotiations early in the year between the executive and legislative branches to establish a permanent electoral council.

While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, attitudes toward Voudou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. Voudou community leaders stated that Voudou practitioners continued to experience some social stigmatization for their beliefs and practices. They used as an example the problems the children of Voudou practitioners faced in non-secular educational environments, stating that school teachers and administrators at times openly rejected and condemned Voudou

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culture and customs. Other individuals expressed concern about what they perceived as increasing Muslim influence on society. Protestant and Catholic religious leaders reported good working relationships with the government.

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

U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with faith-based nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and government officials to seek their views on religious freedom and on religion's role in political culture and the country's development. Representatives of religious groups (Protestant denominations and Voudou practitioners) participated in U.S. embassy-sponsored civil society roundtable discussions on human rights and tolerance in February.