



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Antigua and Barbuda

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 170 square miles and a population of 77,000. Seventy-four percent of the population was Christian. The Anglican Church was the largest religious denomination, accounting for an estimated 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches accounted for approximately 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that included most independent evangelical churches, claimed an estimated 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses numbered more than 1,000 members. The total number of non-Christians was small; they included an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 adherents of Islam, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Baha'i Faith. According to the 2001 census report, there were more than 4,000 atheists or persons who did not follow a particular religion.

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.

The Government is secular; however, the Government maintained a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The prime minister is responsible for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, whose role is to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the free movement of pastors into the country.

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

Ministers of religion are constitutionally prohibited from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and development, are available to groups that are registered.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of their curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, an aspect of their religious ritual, is prohibited. Rastafarian representatives met with the prime minister in 2004 and submitted a petition to decriminalize the use of marijuana; however, no known changes to existing laws were made during the period covered by this report.

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 Antigua Christian Council conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

Rastafarians complained of widespread discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

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 discussed these issues with local religious groups.

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