



## Antigua and Barbuda

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom 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 83,000. According to the 2001 census, 74 percent of the population is Christian. The Anglican Church is the largest religious denomination, accounting for an estimated 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches account for less than 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses number more than 1,000 members. Non-Christians include an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 Muslims, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Baha'i Faith.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular; however, the Government maintains 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 Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Groups that are registered receive tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and renovation.

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

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

In February 2007 the Antigua and Barbuda Islamic Society formally submitted a development plan to the Development Control Authority for the construction of a community center. The president of the Islamic Society claimed that the Government discriminated against them by not approving the plan.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was prohibited.

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

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also discussed religious freedom with local religious groups.

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