



## Antigua and Barbuda

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

**October 26, 2009**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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 reporting period.

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 86,000. According to the 2001 census, 74 percent of the population is Christian. The Anglican Church is the largest religious group, 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 Government Respect for 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 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 greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the entry of religious workers 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. Registered groups 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 reporting period.

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

The Baha'i community alleged that government officials at all levels denied their repeated requests to schedule meetings with them. They attributed this to their persistent calls for the Government to abstain from voting on the "no action motion" at the U.N. on human rights in Iran.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners 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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

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

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. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy also discussed religious freedom with local religious groups.