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## Barbados

### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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 166 square miles and a population of approximately 277,000. More than 95 percent of the population was considered Christian, although persons may not have been active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church constituted the largest religious group, with approximately 70,000 members; an estimated 65 percent were active in the Church. The next largest denomination was the Seventh-day Adventists, numbering approximately 16,000 members, 10,000 of whom were active. There were approximately 11,000 Roman Catholics; an estimated 20 percent were active. Pentecostals numbered approximately 7,000; more than 50 percent were active. Methodists numbered an estimated 5,000, according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the previous official census; an estimated 60 percent of members were active. There were approximately 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; more than 95 percent were active. Baptists, Moravians, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) were present in small numbers.

The number of non-Christians was small. There were an estimated 2,700 Muslims, most of whom were immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Indian state of Gujarat. A few immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as approximately 200 Barbadians, comprised the rest of the growing Muslim community. There were three mosques and an Islamic center. Other minority religious groups included Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and members of the Baha'i Faith.

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

Religious groups were required to register with the Government to obtain duty-free import privileges or tax benefits, but no complaints were received that the process was onerous.

Foreign missionaries were required to apply for entry visas. These were obtained easily, and there were no other special requirements imposed to acquire them.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as "values education." The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from minority religious groups are also invited to speak to students.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, pertinent to their religious rituals, is illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring. No new developments were reported concerning complaints that in March 2005, following a prison riot, prison officials shaved the dreadlocks of Rastafarian prisoners after the discovery of contraband in the hair of some members of that religious group. Likewise, no new developments were noted regarding the Rastafarian community's request for government assistance in setting up a primary school, on the grounds that the government schools instilled beliefs in Rastafarian children that conflicted with their faith.

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

Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and Muslim communities stated that they experienced occasional criticism for their religious beliefs and practices, but they generally believed that society was very tolerant. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, 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. U.S. embassy representatives also discussed freedom of religion with local groups and other organizations.

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