

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and of religious belief and practice, including worship. It prohibits discrimination based on religion. Laws prohibit actions that incite religious hatred and violence. The government provided financial support to religious groups and participated in various groups' ceremonies and holiday celebrations.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy conducted outreach to various religious groups to support religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders to discuss religious understanding and acceptance and delivered remarks highlighting the importance of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.2 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 26.5 percent of the population is Protestant, including 12 percent Pentecostal or evangelical, 5.7 percent Anglican, 4.1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 2.5 percent Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.2 percent Baptist, 0.7 percent Methodist, and 0.3 percent Moravian. An additional 21.6 percent is Roman Catholic, 18.2 percent Hindu, 5 percent Muslim, and 1.5 percent Jehovah's Witnesses. Traditional Caribbean religious groups with African roots include the Spiritual Baptists (sometimes called Shouter Baptists), represent 5.7 percent of the population, and the Orisha – a religion that incorporates elements of West African spiritualism and Christianity – is at 0.9 percent. According to the census, 2.2 percent lists having no religious affiliation, 11.1 percent does not state a religious affiliation, and 7.5 percent lists its affiliation as "other," which includes a number of small Christian groups, as well as Bahais, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews.

The ethnic and religious composition of the two islands varies distinctly. On Trinidad, those of African descent make up 32 percent of the population and are predominantly Christian, along with a small Muslim community concentrated in and around Port of Spain, along the east-west corridor of northern Trinidad, and in certain areas of central and south Trinidad. Those of East Indian descent comprise

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37 percent of the population and are mostly Hindu, with some Muslims, Presbyterians, and Catholics. The population of Tobago is 85 percent African descent and predominantly Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and of religious belief and observance, including worship. It recognizes the existence of basic fundamental human rights and freedoms without discrimination by reason of religion.

The law prohibits acts of sedition and seditious intent, defined as engendering or promoting feelings of ill will towards, hostility to, or contempt for any class of inhabitants, including on the basis of religion.

A fine of up to 1,000 Trinidad and Tobago dollars (TT) (\$157) may be levied for expressions of hatred directed specifically against a person's religion, including any "riotous, violent, indecent, or disorderly behavior in any place of divine worship," or attacks, ridicule, or vilification of another person's religion in a manner likely to provoke a breach of the peace.

Judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination. An anti-blasphemy law is not enforced.

To receive tax-exempt donations or gifts of land, or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the government, which requires them to demonstrate they are nonprofit organizations. To register, groups must be in operation for at least one year, and must submit a request for charitable status to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. The request must include a certificate or articles of incorporation, the constitution and bylaws of the organization, and the most recently audited financial statements. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of their registration status. They may, for example, own land and hire employees, and are likewise liable for property taxes and government-mandated employee benefits.

The government permits religious instruction in public schools, allocating time each week during which any religious group with an adherent in the school may provide an instructor at the parents' request. Attendance at these classes is

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voluntary, and the religious groups represented are diverse. The law states no persons shall be refused admission to any public school on account of their religious beliefs, and no child shall be required to attend any religious observance or receive instruction in religious subjects as a condition of admission or continued attendance in a public school. While parents may enroll their children in religiously-affiliated private schools as an alternative to public education, the law does not permit homeschooling.

Missionaries must meet standard requirements for entry visas and must represent a registered religious group. Permits are valid for a maximum period of three years, at a cost of TT 500 (\$79) per year. Missionaries may not remain longer than three years per visit, but may re-enter after a year's absence.

Government Practices

The government financially supported activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), an interfaith coordinating committee representing most major religious groups. The IRO president or a representative regularly delivered the invocation at government-sponsored events, including the opening of parliament and the annual court term. According to the IRO president, the government increased its engagement with and financing of religious organizations during the year.

The Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration in collaboration with the IRO hosted a national week of prayer encouraging all faiths to pray for the nation at their respective places of worship.

Members of the government often participated in ceremonies and holidays of various religious groups, regularly emphasizing religious tolerance and harmony, and government officials routinely spoke publicly against religious intolerance. The minister of national diversity and social integration, for instance, commented on the importance of religious diversity during his remarks at a large Diwali celebration. The prime minister participated in religious events during Ramadan, Diwali, Eid al-Fitr, Easter, and Corpus Christi, and issued corresponding public statements underscoring religious freedom as a deeply held national value.

The government provided financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious celebrations. The prime minister announced in

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December a TT \$55 million (\$8.7 million) grant to Christian churches, and at an associated public speech stated, “We give support to all religions.”

The Ministry of the People and Social Development was responsible for relations with religious groups and administered financial grants in response to formal written requests for support. It also issued recommendations on land use by such groups.

The government subsidized both nondenominational public schools and religiously affiliated public schools, including schools operated by Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim groups.

The government continued to limit the number of foreign missionaries whose stays in the country exceed 30 days to 35 per registered religious group at any given time as a matter of Ministry of National Security administrative policy. Some international religious groups or denominations reportedly maintained more than 35 total missionaries in the country if they were affiliated with more than one registered group, including nonprofit groups and charities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy conducted outreach to various religious groups to support the continued promotion of religious freedom and tolerance. The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy representatives met with leaders of various religious organizations and visited a number of religious sites.

The embassy hosted a roundtable to discuss continued interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance between non-member and member representatives of the IRO.

The embassy hosted an iftar during which the Charge d’Affaires and the president of the largest Muslim association delivered remarks highlighting the value of religious freedom.

Embassy staff regularly met with Muslim religious and civil society leaders, and these discussions included issues related to religious understanding and

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acceptance. Embassy staff also continued working with religious groups such as the Ahamdiyya Muslim Community of Trinidad and Tobago and the Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association, the country's largest Muslim organization.

Embassy staff met with the honorary consul for Israel to discuss matters related to the religious freedom of the small Jewish community.