

# **SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion. The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious reasons. Rastafarians said they disagreed with the government's ban on marijuana, stating it was integral to their religious rituals. Vaccinations as a requirement for school enrollment remained under discussion between Ministry of Health officials and Rastafarians with school-age children. Ministry of Mobilization officials stated accommodations permitted dreadlocks at work with appropriate headgear.

Rastafarians stated they continued to face discrimination because of their religious practices, in particular their use of marijuana. Rastafarian activists stated, however, that Rastafarians were increasingly accepted in society, and society was more tolerant of their way of life.

U.S. embassy officials raised general religious freedom issues with the government. Embassy officials discussed the prohibition of Rastafarian dreadlocks with the Ministry of Mobilization. .

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 102,000 (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2012 government census, 82.3 percent of the population identifies as Christian, among them Pentecostals comprising 27.6 percent, Anglicans 13.9 percent, Seventh-day Adventists 11.6 percent, Baptists 8.9 percent, Methodists 8.7 percent and Roman Catholics 6.3 percent. Those with no religion account for 7.5 percent of the population. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Rastafarians, Muslims, and Hindus.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution affirms the country "is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God." A person has the right to freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and of religion and freedom to change his religion or belief. In addition,

he or she has the freedom to practice his religion, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish schools and provide religious instruction to those wishing to receive it. Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity. Christian prayers are recited at school assemblies; attendance and participation are not mandatory. Students wishing to opt out of Christian prayer or religious education classes are excused from participation.

An antiblasphemy law is not enforced.

The law prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

Rastafarian activists stated they remained in disagreement with the government's prohibition of marijuana use, which they described as integral to their religious rituals. The Ministry of Mobilization said accommodations permitted dreadlocks for Rastafarians at work with appropriate headgear. Vaccinations as a requirement for school enrollment remained under discussion between Ministry of Health officials and Rastafarians with school age children.

Representatives from varied religious groups, especially Anglican and Catholic, were occasionally invited to speak to students. Teachers also provided information on other religious groups.

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

Rastafarians stated they continued to face societal discrimination because of their use of marijuana, but also stated that Rastafarians were increasingly accepted in society, and society was more tolerant of their way of life. One individual cited the healthy diet of Rastafarians as improving their standing in society. The Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association stated the positive involvement of Rastafarian parents in their children's education was well regarded.

Rastafarians said they continued to face scrutiny from police and immigration officials. A taxi driver said he would refuse to drive Rastafarians for fear the

police would stop and search his vehicle. Rastafarians also cited the prohibition of dreadlocks in certain work areas and schools.

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

The U.S. embassy raised general religious freedom subjects with the government, including Rastafarian concerns about the prohibition of their dreadlocks with the Ministry of Mobilization.