

DOMINICA 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom of thought, freedom to practice one's religion, and freedom from oaths contrary to one's beliefs. Rastafarians continued to disagree with the government's prohibition of marijuana use. Members of the Rastafarian community said police and immigration officials continued to subject them to scrutiny because of the community's use of marijuana for religious rituals. According to reports by both the police and members of the Rastafarian community, persons of other religions were not subject to such scrutiny. Members of the Rastafarian community stated, however, that their relationship with the government had improved and the number of police stops and searches of Rastafarians had declined.

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

U.S. embassy representatives engaged representatives of the government, including the chief welfare officer of the Ministry of Social Services, Family, and Gender Affairs. Embassy representatives emphasized the importance of freedom of religious expression and issues of discrimination based on religious affiliation, including harassment and discrimination issues that Rastafarians said they faced. Embassy representatives also engaged civil society leaders, including members of the Rastafarian community, members of the Dominica Christian Council, the resident Catholic bishop, and members of the Evangelical Association of Dominica on religious freedom issues, including freedom of religious expression and discrimination based on religion.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 74,000 (July 2017). According to data from the 2011 census, approximately 53 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Evangelical Protestants comprise approximately 20 percent of the population. The largest evangelical Protestant groups are Pentecostals with 6 percent, Baptists with 5 percent, and the Christian Union Mission with 4 percent. Seventh-day Adventists comprise 7 percent of the population. Other smaller religious groups include Anglicans, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, and Rastafarians. Nine percent of the population professes no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom of thought, freedom to practice one's religion, and freedom from taking oaths contrary to one's beliefs. By law, the government may make exceptions to constitutionally required provisions in the interests of public order and morality if the exceptions are for activities "shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society."

Religious groups seeking nonprofit status must register with the Attorney General's Office. They must submit a letter signed by five executives of the religious group and provide the official name of the religious group with an address identifying the place of worship. The registration fee is 25 Eastern Caribbean dollars (\$9). The Attorney General's Registry Office reviews and approves applications. Any organization denied permission to register has the right to apply for judicial review. By law, religious groups must also register buildings used to publish bans of marriage (announcements of marriage) or used as places of worship.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and to provide religious instruction. Public schools may hold nondenominational prayers. Parents may homeschool their children.

The government imposes no legal regulations on foreign missionaries beyond the standard immigration laws for entering and remaining in the country.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana for any purpose, including for religious purposes.

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

Government Practices

The government continued to enforce its ban on any type of marijuana use. Government officials and members of civil society, including Rastafarian associations, stated that Rastafarians continued to disagree with the government's prohibition of marijuana use because Rastafarians believe marijuana is integral to their religious rituals. Members of the Rastafarian community said police and immigration officials continued to subject them to scrutiny because of the use of

marijuana in the Rastafarian community. According to reports by both the police and members of the Rastafarian community, persons of other religious groups were not subject to such scrutiny. Some Rastafarian leaders said their children were not eligible to attend public schools because the schools required immunizations for all students and the Rastafarians did not vaccinate their children because of their religious beliefs. Members of the Rastafarian community stated, however, that their relationship with the government had improved and the number of police stops and searches of Rastafarians had declined. There were no reports of police arrests of Rastafarians during the year in connection with marijuana for religious use.

The government subsidized teacher salaries at all private schools run by religious organizations, including those affiliated with the Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches.

At public schools, teachers, principals, and students continued to lead nondenominational prayers during morning assemblies, but students were not required to participate.

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 and Engagement

Embassy officials raised religious freedom subjects with the government, including with the chief welfare officer of the Ministry of Social Services, Family, and Gender Affairs. They discussed issues of police and immigration harassment of Rastafarians, the inability for unvaccinated Rastafarian children to enter school, and the importance of media messaging to encourage religious diversity and tolerance.

Embassy officials engaged religious groups and civil society leaders, including the Rastafarians, Catholic Church, Christian Council, and Evangelical Association, in a series of discussions on the issues of religious freedom and discrimination as a means to encourage tolerance and respect for religious diversity. The embassy also used Facebook to promote messages about the importance of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity across the Eastern Caribbean.