

SAINT LUCIA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion as well as the right to change, manifest, and propagate the religion of one's choice. The government does not officially recognize marriages conducted under Rastafarian rites. Rastafarians reported reluctance to use marijuana for religious purposes because of the government's prohibition and imposition of fines for any use. Ministry of Education regulations require vaccinations for children to enter school. Because of their belief against vaccinating their children, Rastafarians stated they faced discrimination in the school system by health authorities. Some Rastafarian families reportedly decided to vaccinate their children or to homeschool.

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

The U.S. embassy discussed with representatives from the Ministry of Social Transformation allegations of discrimination against the Rastafarians. Embassy officials met with leaders of the Rastafarian community to discuss cases of discrimination and freedom of religious expression.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 164,000 (July 2016 estimate). The 2010 Population and Housing Census, the latest available, reports Roman Catholics account for 61.1 percent of the population; Seventh-day Adventists, 10.4 percent; Pentecostals, 8.8 percent; evangelicals, 2.2 percent; Baptists, 2.1 percent; and Rastafarians, 2 percent. Other groups, together constituting less than 2 percent of the population, include Anglicans, members of the Church of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Muslims, and Bahais. Nearly 6 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states "a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of" freedom of conscience, including of thought and religion, and in the manifestation and propagation of religion or belief through practice, worship, teaching, and observance. It protects individuals' right to change their religion and prohibits

religious instruction without consent in schools, prisons, and military service. An anti-blasphemy law is not enforced.

The government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sport, Culture and Local Government if their membership exceeds 250 individuals. Groups that register are “incorporated” and eligible to receive associated benefits; groups that do not register are treated as for-profit organizations for taxation purposes. Among the information requested on the registration form is contact information, establishment date and history, declaration of belief, number of members, location of meeting place, and income source.

After the religious group registers with the Ministry, it may apply for concessions, including duty-free import privileges and exemption from some labor requirements. The registration policy defines the process for missionary work and labor permits.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education; students are not required to participate. The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain schools and provide religious instruction, at their own expense. The Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Anglican Churches all sponsor schools.

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

The government does not recognize marriages conducted under Rastafarian rites. Rastafarians married by Rastafarian rite are unable to obtain a marriage certificate from the Registrar of Civil Status, which affects spouses’ entitlement to inheritance.

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

Government Practices

Rastafarians stated the government’s prohibition of marijuana and accompanying fines for use made them reluctant to use marijuana and thus prevented them from carrying out religious practices. Ministry of Education regulations require schoolchildren be vaccinated in order to enter school. Rastafarians do not believe

in vaccination; however, some reportedly decided to vaccinate their children to enable them to enter school. Others chose to homeschool.

The government regularly consulted with the Christian Council, which consisted of representatives of the Catholic Church and some Protestant denominations, on issues of pending legislation or policies.

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

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with government officials from the Ministry of Social Transformation, who participated in the embassy's workshop on combatting religious intolerance and discrimination. Officials discussed the Rastafarians' perception that police and educational officials discriminate against them. Embassy officials engaged with religious group leaders and civil society, including with the leadership of the Rastafarian communities and an interdenominational group, on freedom of religious expression and discrimination.