

# **DOMINICA 2018 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 said they continued to press the government to legalize marijuana use. Representatives of the Rastafarian community reported authorities did not enforce the law against using marijuana when they used it in their religious rites. Members of the Rastafarian community stated their relationship with the government had improved significantly.

Interdenominational organizations worked to advance respect for religious freedom and diversity regardless of denominational affiliation. Members of the Dominica Christian Council and the resident Roman Catholic bishop said they did not consider religious freedom to be an issue for Christians or to their knowledge for other religious groups.

Embassy officials raised religious freedom with the government, including with the chief welfare officer of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Family, and Gender Affairs. They discussed Rastafarian allegations of extra scrutiny by police and immigration officials due to Rastafarians' use of marijuana in their religious rites. U.S. embassy representatives engaged civil society leaders, including members of the Rastafarian community, members of the Dominica Christian Council, and the resident Catholic bishop, on religious freedom issues, including freedom of religious expression and societal discrimination based on religion.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 74,000 (July 2018). According to data from the 2011 census, approximately 53 percent of the population is Catholic. Evangelical Protestants constitute 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 constitute 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 also must 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. Students of different religions may attend private schools run by religious groups of another affiliation. Public schools may hold nondenominational prayers, and attendance is optional. The law requires the vaccination of all children to attend both public and private schools. 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**

Rastafarians continued to press the government to legalize marijuana use. Representatives of the Rastafarian community reported authorities did not enforce the law against using marijuana when they used it in their religious rites. Members of the Rastafarian community stated their relationship with the government had

improved significantly. 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 due to their religious beliefs. There were no reports of police arrests of Rastafarians during the year in connection with marijuana for religious use.

Members of the Christian community reported they had a positive working relationship with police. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Family, and Gender Affairs collaborated with the Christian community's Interdenominational Committee on Crime and Violence in its work to reduce crime and provide opportunities for youth.

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**

Interdenominational organizations worked to advance respect for religious freedom and diversity regardless of denominational affiliation. Members of the Dominica Christian Council and the resident Catholic bishop said they did not consider religious freedom to be an issue for Christians or to their knowledge for other religious groups.

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

U.S. embassy officials raised religious freedom with the government, including with the chief welfare officer of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Family, and Gender Affairs. They discussed Rastafarian allegations of extra scrutiny by police and immigration officials due to Rastafarians' use of marijuana in their religious rites.

Embassy representatives engaged civil society leaders, including members of the Rastafarian community, members of the Dominica Christian Council, and the resident Catholic bishop, on religious freedom issues such as freedom of religious expression and societal discrimination based on religion.