

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The government continued to ban the use of marijuana, including for religious activities, which affects some practitioners of the Rastafarian religion. Civil society sources stated Rastafarians still faced some police harassment for the possession and use of marijuana, but on a legal, not religious, basis. The Ministry of Health continued to require the immunization of children before enrolling in school, but it offered waivers for unvaccinated Rastafarian children.

According to media reports, Rastafarians continued to face some societal discrimination, particularly in seeking private sector employment. Media also reported some businesses continued to place restrictions on dreadlocks in some instances when required by safety and hygiene regulations.

U.S. embassy officials engaged representatives of the government and civil society on religious freedom issues, including government promotion of religious diversity and tolerance, equal treatment under the law, and the required vaccination of children entering the school system.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 53,000 (July 2018 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17 percent of the population is Anglican; 16 percent Methodist; 11 percent Pentecostal; 7 percent Church of God; 6 percent Roman Catholic; 5 percent each Baptist, Moravian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Wesleyan Holiness; 4 percent other; and 2 percent each Brethren, evangelical Christian, and Hindu. An additional 1 percent each is Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim, and Rastafarian; less than 1 percent, each is Baha'i, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army. Nine percent state no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion. It prohibits discrimination based on religious belief.

The Ministry of Nevis Affairs, Labor, Social Security, and Ecclesiastical Affairs is responsible for registering religious groups. Religious groups are not required to register, but doing so provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information on government policy for religious groups. Registration also allows religious groups to act as charities and import religious items duty-free.

The constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain schools at the religious community's own expense. Public schools offer Christian religious instruction, daily prayers, and religious assemblies; students who do not want to attend are exempt from all religious activities. Public schools require vaccinations for children to attend school.

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

The law does not prohibit the wearing of dreadlocks; however, businesses may restrict it for safety or hygiene reasons. Occupational safety and health legislation requires all employees, including those with dreadlocks, to cover their hair when using dangerous equipment, handling food, or undertaking health-related activities.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Civil society and representatives of the Organization for Rastafarian Unity (ORU) stated that police sometimes stopped Rastafarians for marijuana use and possession but did not single out or harass them specifically because of their religion.

The Ministry of Health continued to require the immunization of all children before enrolling in school, but ORU sources said the government allowed waivers for unvaccinated Rastafarian children attending public schools. Some children of the Rastafarian community were home schooled, but statistics were not available.

Prison officials allowed Rastafarian prisoners to keep their dreadlocks unless they posed health-related issues or used them to transport contraband. The prison did not provide different diets based on prisoners' religious dietary restrictions.

On August 21, media reported that the government met with Christian religious leaders to discuss programs to address societal issues including youth crime, gangs, and other antisocial behavior. The same report noted the government regularly collaborated with Christian, Muslim, and Rastafarian religious leaders as part of the government's strategy to engage social partners in policy development.

The government allowed Rastafarian groups equal access to public venues for religious celebrations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the ORU, Rastafarians continued to face some societal discrimination, such as in the job market. ORU representatives also said private sector employment discrimination continued to decline during the year, but they did not provide specific examples.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials engaged representatives of the government on religious freedom issues, including the importance of respect for religious diversity. They discussed issues involving government support for tolerance and equal treatment under the law, as well as vaccination requirements for children entering the school system.

Embassy officials met with representatives from the Christian and Rastafarian communities to discuss religious freedom issues, including the importance of freedom of religious expression and discrimination based on religion.