

SAINT LUCIA 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and individuals' right to change, manifest, and propagate the religion of their choosing. Rastafarian community representatives reported their reluctance to use marijuana for religious purposes because marijuana use was illegal and subject to punitive fines. Rastafarians said they continued to face discrimination in the school system because the Ministry of Education required vaccinations for all children attending school; Rastafarians continued to oppose vaccination, which they stated was part of their religious beliefs. Government officials and Rastafarian community members said some Rastafarian families decided to vaccinate their children or to homeschool. They also reported national insurance plans did not cover traditional doctors used by the Rastafarian community. Rastafarians said the number of targeted searches by police and immigration officers decreased during the year. They also reported that officials from the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, and Local Government engaged in constructive dialogue and outreach with the Rastafarian community.

According to the Islamic Association, some male and female members of the Muslim community continued to experience occasional harassment when they wore head coverings and clothing that identified them as Muslim. The Catholic Church and the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean continued to hold interfaith meetings to promote respect for religious diversity and tolerance.

U.S. embassy officials discussed respect for religious minorities with officials of the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, and Local Government, which is responsible for ecclesiastical affairs. Embassy officials also met and discussed issues related to religious freedom with leaders of the Rastafarian, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 166,000 (July 2018 estimate). The 2010 Population and Housing Census, the latest available, reports Roman Catholics are 61.1 percent of the population; Seventh-day Adventists, 10.4 percent; Pentecostals, 8.8 percent; evangelical Christians, 7.2 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, Hindus, and Baha'is. Nearly 6 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation. Unofficial estimates of the Muslim population, which is mainly Sunni, range from 150 to 400. According to the Jewish community, there are approximately 200 Jewish residents.

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' rights to change their religion and prohibits religious instruction without consent in schools, prisons, and military service. A blasphemy law is not enforced.

The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, and Local Government is responsible for ecclesiastical affairs, implements the government's policy on faith-based organizations, and meets regularly with religious groups to address their concerns. The government requires religious groups to register with the ministry if their membership exceeds 250 individuals. To register, groups must provide contact information, an organization's establishment date and history, declaration of belief, number of members, location of meeting place, and income sources. The government "incorporates" registered groups, which are eligible to receive associated benefits, while it treats unregistered groups as for-profit organizations for taxation purposes. After the religious group registers with the ministry, it may apply for concessions, including duty-free import privileges and exemption from some labor requirements.

Ministry of Education regulations require the vaccination of all schoolchildren, regardless of religious beliefs, before they enter public or private school. The public school curriculum includes religious studies; the Ministry of Education does not require students to participate in these classes. The classes familiarize students with the core beliefs of world religions, rather than promoting the adoption of any particular faith. 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 each sponsor private schools, where they teach their respective religious beliefs to their students. The government provides approximately 50 percent of the funding for these schools. All students may attend private religious schools regardless of belief or nonbelief.

The government's registration policy defines the process for missionary work and labor permits. Immigration authorities grant work permits for individuals entering the country to conduct missionary work. As long as an individual is law abiding, there are no restrictions on any category of foreign missionaries.

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

Government Practices

The Rastafarian community stated officials from the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, and Local Government engaged in constructive dialogue with their community leaders and outreach with the broader Rastafarian community. The primary dialogue topic was encouraging the government to legalize marijuana.

Rastafarian community representatives reported their reluctance to use marijuana for religious purposes because marijuana use was illegal and subject to punitive fines. Rastafarians said, however, the number of targeted searches by police and immigration officers decreased during the year. They also stated Ministry of Education regulations requiring the vaccination of schoolchildren to enter school continued to represent a barrier because Rastafarians do not believe in vaccinating their children. Some Rastafarians said they decided to vaccinate their children so they could attend school; others chose to homeschool. Rastafarians stated the lack of insurance coverage for traditional doctors some Rastafarians used continued to be a problem.

The government continued to consult with the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies, as well as the Christian Council, comprising representatives of the Catholic Church and some Protestant denominations, on issues relevant to their communities. It also continued its informal meetings with members of the Rastafarian community on pending legislation and policies, including recognizing marriages and issues surrounding school attendance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Members of the Muslim community continued to report they were occasionally harassed in public spaces when they wore Islamic religious attire. They said harassment included insulting name-calling and inappropriate questioning by members of the public.

The Catholic Church and the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean continued to hold interdenominational meetings to promote respect for religious diversity and tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials discussed respect for religious minorities with officials of the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports, and Local Government. Embassy officials also engaged with Rastafarian, Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic leaders on the importance of promoting freedom of religious expression and combating societal discrimination based on religion. The religious groups said they were collaborating to further social dialogue and conduct outreach programs in the community that addressed freedom of religious expression, tolerance, and discrimination.